



bhagwati prasad

amitabh kumar

Tinker. Solder. Tap

a graphic novel

TINKER.SOLDER.TAP

TINKER.SOLDER.TAP: a graphic novel
Produced and Designed at the Sarai Media Lab

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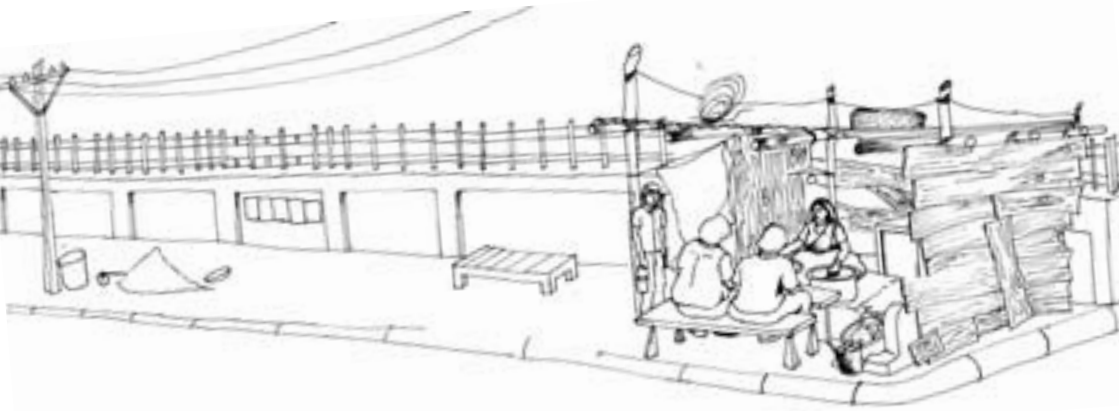
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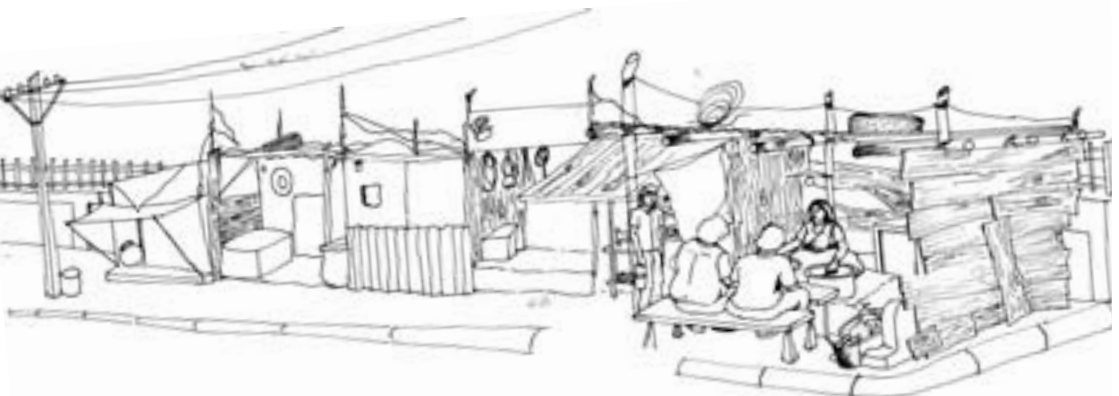
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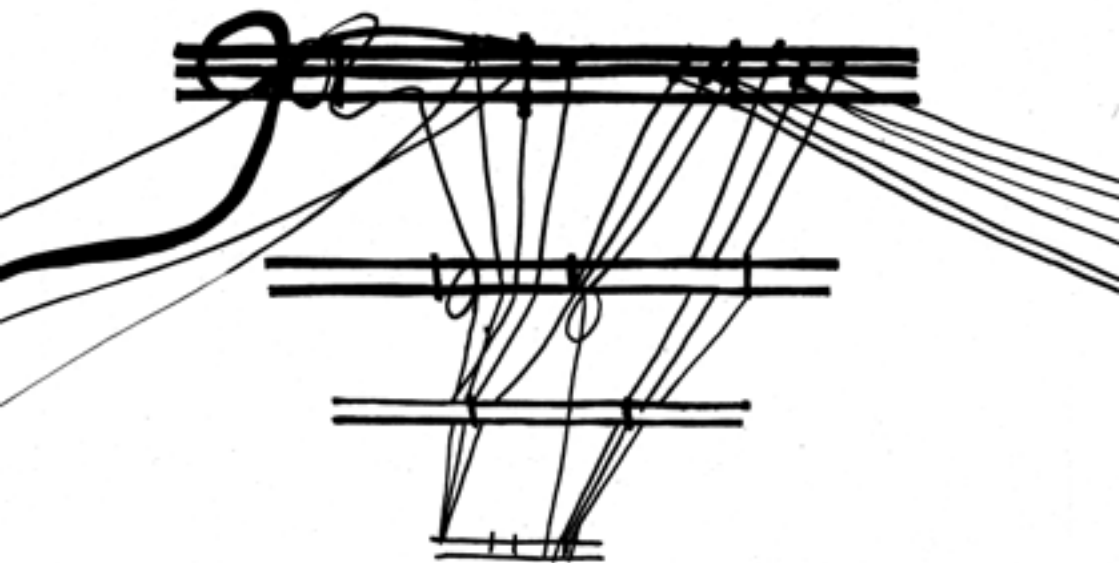
To the memory of
Ram Prasad
(1942 - 2008)





Kallu scans the streets, taking everything in, trying to reconcile what he remembers with what he is seeing.



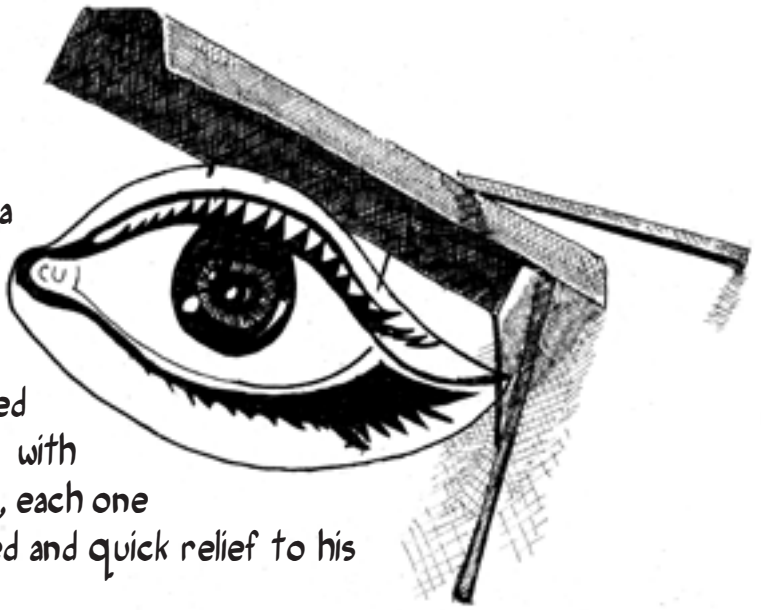


The road that runs through the market is narrower now. Tin shades have grown out from every shop; shops have swelled to take the footpath in. Once past the market he spots the shop, Chashme wala doctor, a familiar landmark.

"Turn in," he tells the taxi driver.



Chashme wala
doctor
doesn't have
any degrees.
He has earned
his reputation with
his treatments, each one
bringing assured and quick relief to his
patients.



He was born Prashottam Dutt, but it was here that he was
christened Eye Doctor.

When he first set shop here, it had been no more than a small
corner of the house. But now it has grown a floor, and its
tiny wooden door has been replaced by a shining glass door.



जेठा डेयरी

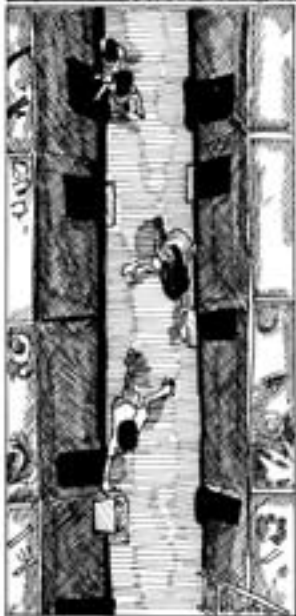
दुध
ली
ची
पनीर
मक्खन

The taxi reached another turn. There's a park here. Small wooden stalls on stilts selling meat preparations line its boundary wall. They bustle with customers at all times - night or day. In six years, their numbers have doubled. The tap everyone used to share for water for cooking and washing utensils seems to have been built around and enclosed into one of the stalls.

The taxi stops. The first shop in this lane is jetha's. Kallu gets out of the taxi, takes the suitcases down and turns towards his lane. As soon as jetha sees Kallu, he leaps towards him. They hug.

Jetha runs a dairy. "I opened it six months ago," he said. He used to run a tea shop earlier. A popular joint, it was always bustling with people from the neighbourhood. Then why did he close it and start a dairy instead? Kallu really wanted to ask, but he had just come back after a long journey; he needed rest. He hadn't even met his wife and children yet. Kallu turned and resumed walking towards his home.

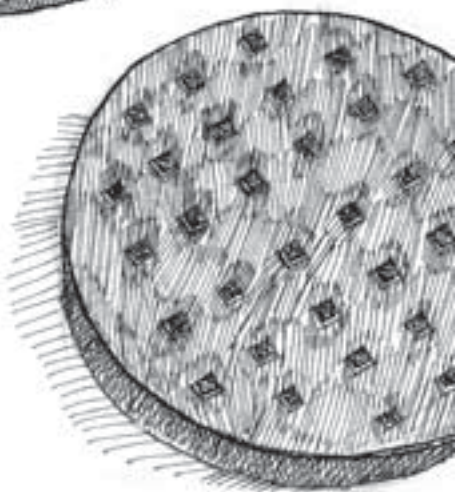








It was lunch break.





Boiled, spicy gram, corn cobs laced with mouth-watering chutney, puffed rice, sweetened puffed rice balls, boiled peas. Hunger satiated.

When the bell announcing the end of the lunch break would ring, they'd slip quickly into school. The gate would now be closed till the end of the day. It was the only entrance. The corridor leading in ends in front of the principal's office.

A playground. Grass grew only along the boundary walls, the ground itself was entirely bare. Dust would blow and cover everyone's bodies.

There were holes in the boundary walls. The walls had been reinforced with grill.



Sunlight cascaded into classrooms through the windows. Each window glassless, six feet tall.

When the air blew in through these windows over the sweating bodies of students, the classrooms felt AC-fitted. Before the invention of electricity, this how people must have stayed cool in summer months. But so that one may not forget this was the present age, each classroom had a switchboard and the roofs were fitted with holders for bulbs.

It was the first class after lunch. That is, the fifth period. History class, to be taken by Agarwal sir, a man habitually late by five minutes.

BONUS FIVE MINUTES TO ROAM ABOUT.

⇒ Go to the toilet, count the cobwebs on the walls and note their progress since the previous day.

⇒ Observe the corners where mosquitoes breed.

⇒ Take a leak. Fill up the tank.

⇒ Conjecture how perplexing a urine sample from one of these urinals would be for a lab.

How fertile land would become if irrigated with this collection!

⇒ Then head back.

At the end of the long corridor is the classroom. It's safe to hang around here - anyone approaching the classroom can be spotted a long way off.

Exactly five minutes after the beginning of the period, we would be seated in our chairs. Silent, obedient students who shoot up respectfully from their chairs in unison when a teacher enters, to greet him.

Today Agarwal sir is wearing a white safari suit, and his sunglasses are firmly in place. That's how he covers his asymmetrical pair of eyes. On his instruction, we opened our books to chapter six. Ajay stood up and began to read aloud. Agarwal sir scanned the class. His eyes hidden by his dark glasses, it was impossible to know who he was looking at, and so this was a period which always saw us at our disciplined best.



Whenever Agarwal sir wanted to convey something important or emphasise some point, he'd turn to the blackboard to write. But the black of this blackboard had been consigned to history and no chalk, however white, could leave a visible imprint on it. Deepak had been given the important task of always carrying a bottle of water with him, so the chalk could be dipped in it before being used on the board. The wet chalk would write invisible words, and within seconds, when it dried, the words would emerge for all to see. This same bottle would then be used by Agarwal sir to wash chalk off his hands.

When we'd feel the weight of history too heavily upon us, we'd find ways of lessening its load. All it needed was for someone to remind sir of his own past:

"Sir,
who studied
with you at St.
Stephens?"



And Agarwal sir would leave aside the lessons of the book and start on the chapters of his own history.



Nothing could hold him back now. Nothing except the bell announcing the end of the period.

In the off chance that he might finish recounting his anecdotes before the period ended, we'd be ready with our second step: bringing up the latest political event, incident or accident. He would launch forth on these like a specialist. If the bell would ring halfway through his oration, he would say irritably, "There! You got me all wound up in something again!" He would pick up his book and move towards the door, and we would all stand up again to respectfully greet him goodbye.

Before the beginning of the sixth period, we'd share among ourselves our notes on all the happening events of the neighbourhood.



He was known throughout the neighbourhood
for the sweets that he made.





Subhash's father was a halwai. Whenever there was a wedding, a birthday party, any celebration, Subhash's father was sent for. It wasn't that he was the only halwai in the neighbourhood, but the status Subhash's father had earned went unmatched. He was known by the name, Kallu halwai. It was said he had magic in his hands. If ever he'd send one of his apprentices in his place, people would get restless and begin investigating where he had gone instead of coming there.

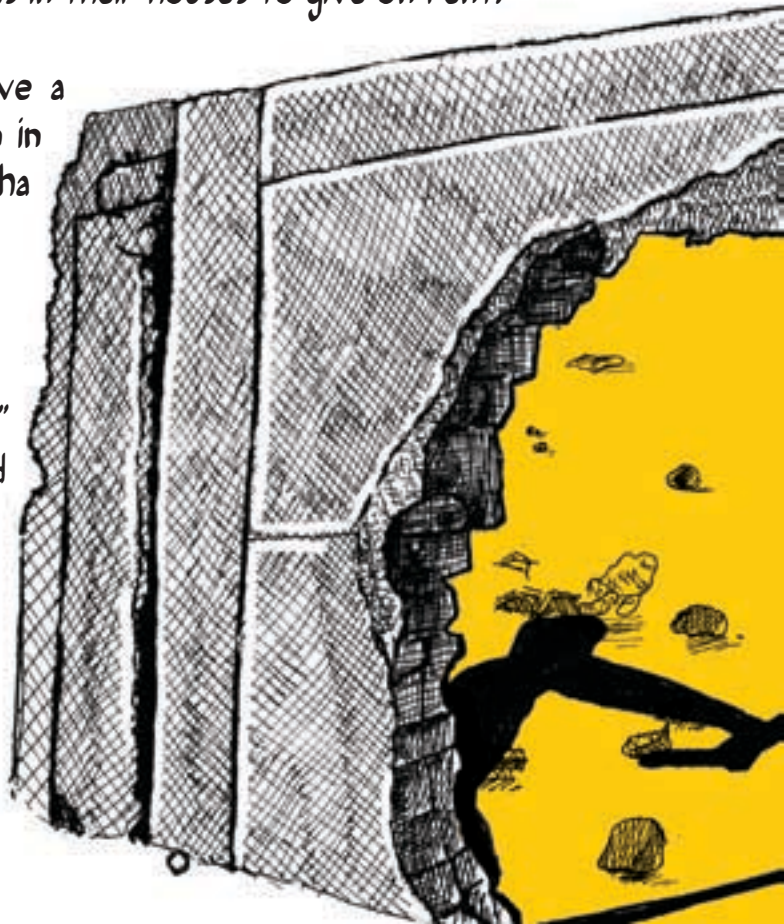
It was said about him that he had gone abroad. Everyone knew he had gone to Iraq but it wasn't very clear what he was doing there. Perhaps it had something to do with cooking. The rumour was that by the time he returns, he will have earned bags of money.

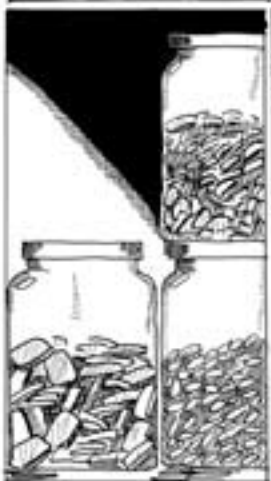
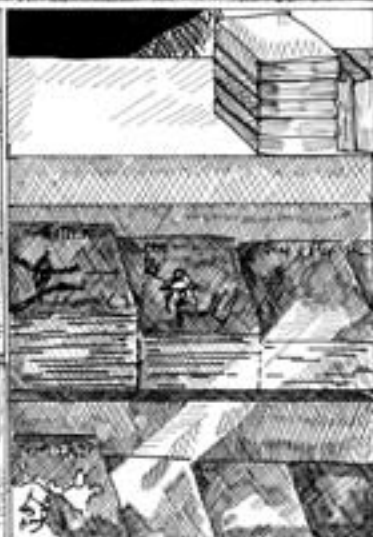
Now that he was back, all that everyone talked about was him. People would stop him in the lane and ask him, "So Kallu, what all did you bring back?" He'd laugh and try and change the topic. But once he'd begin talking about where he had been, he would carry on, unable to stop himself.

Everything has changed here.

Kallu sat in jetha's shop, surveying the street. "Yes," jetha said, "Now you see how neat everything looks. The lanes have been made pucca with cement and stone. And people have also made rooms in their houses to give on rent."

"And look I have a gas connection in my dairy," jetha said. "Every home here has one. Even Pooran has a connection..." Kallu cut in and asked him how Pooran was. "Oh he's still lending out magazines."





Pooran's shop is at the end of the lane. His shop has novels, magazines, comic books, newspapers, calendars. It's unique in the area in that way. People come to him from far.

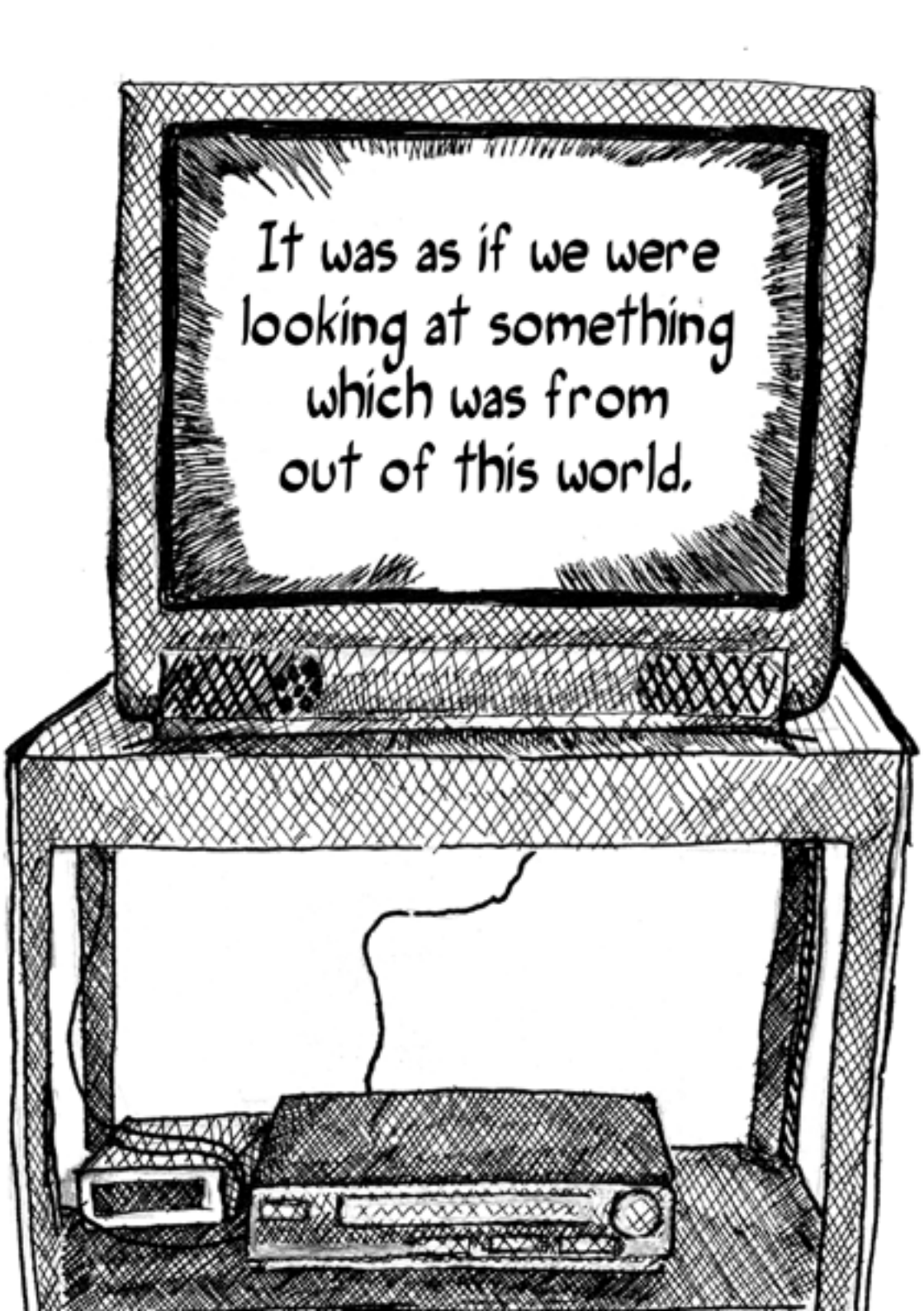


Pooran cycles down to Daryaganj early in the mornings to bring magazines for his shop. He has four children, and he earns enough from his shop to raise them and get by.

"And Teerath?" Kallu asked.

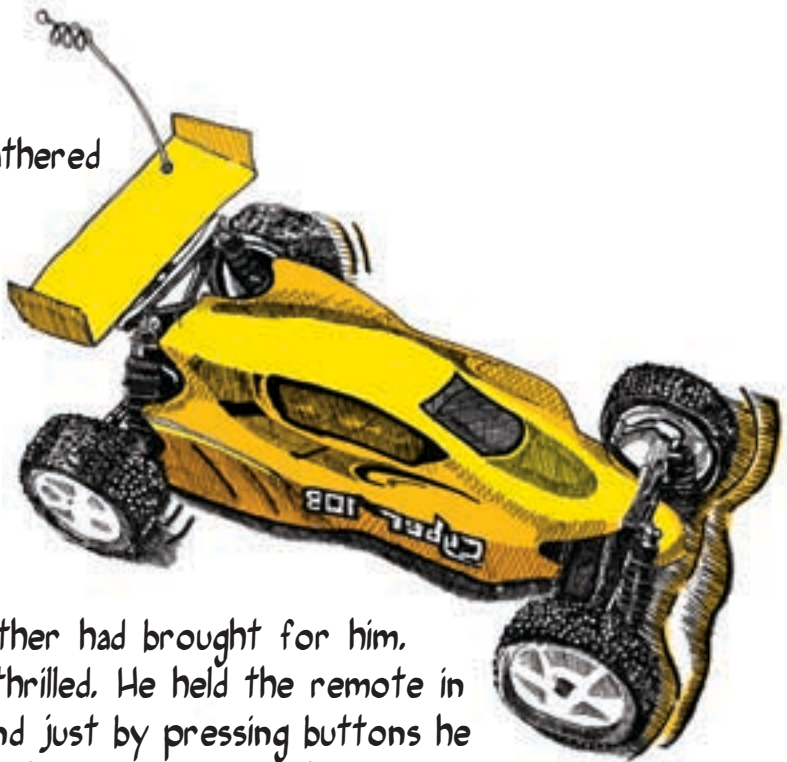
Jetha sighed, "People found his eldest son in the street, badly beaten and bleeding. While they were taking him to the hospital in an auto he told them the police had picked him up. It had something to do with gambling in the park. He was on his way home. He was beaten up at the station, then left in the street. He was found in the morning. Who knows how long he'd been lying there. He lost consciousness in the autorickshaw, before they reached the hospital. The police beat him up for alerting the men in the park. The doctors declared him dead on arrival."





It was as if we were
looking at something
which was from
out of this world.

We had gathered
outside
Subhash's
house.
He came
out and
brought
along the
remote
controlled



car his father had brought for him.
We were thrilled. He held the remote in
his hand and just by pressing buttons he
could make the car stop, race ahead or take a
turn. We stood transfixed. We were just about to ask him if
we could try a hand at the remote when his mother called him
in. We were back again that evening.

There was a crowd outside
his house. We saw a doll
made of plastic cry, just
like a human baby.





People stood at the door. Inside, a film was playing on TV. The film was "Hero". But there isn't any film on TV today. The film was playing from a VCR, which Subhash's father had brought with him. When it got too crowded, Subhash's mother shut the door.

I stood by the window, holding on tightly to the railing, fighting my urge to pee. After all, it's not everyday that one gets to see a film without buying a ticket or without having to wait for the one scheduled on TV!

My bladder was near bursting by the time the film ended. I ran to the park to relieve myself.

There are parks in every block here.

Parks that defy all notions of what a park is. The green stuff called grass is unknown here. There is an abundant scattering of garbage. The boundary wall is almost entirely broken. From time to time the Municipal Corporation gathers up the garbage, digs a giant hole, dumps the garbage into it and sets it on fire. Even if something were to be planted in such a soil, rocks might be all that will grow out.





"There's a film playing at Pyare's."

"But it's Wednesday today. And the only person who has a VCR is Kallu. Then how come?"

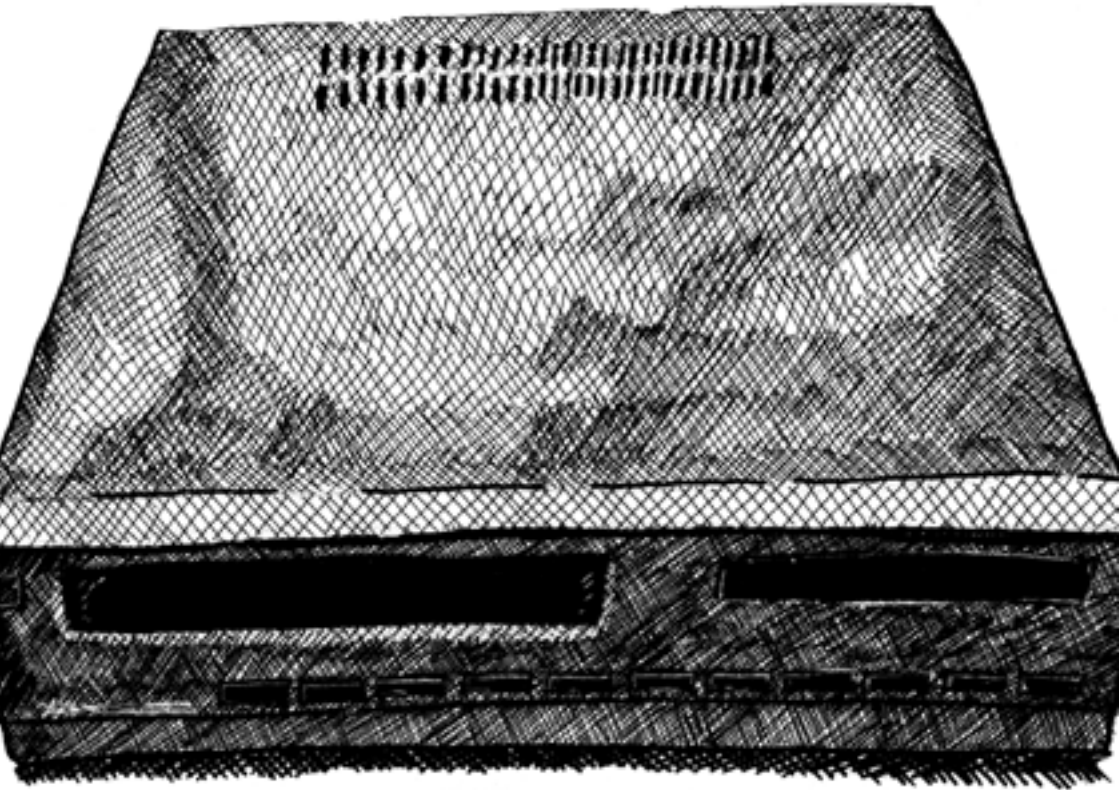
"It's Kallu's VCR."

"How come it's at Pyare's?"

"He lends it out for a fee."

"So that means we too can watch a film at our house?"

"Of course."



Hemant and Darshan were thinking about how to convince their families to hire the VCR.

Hemant was helping his mother make envelopes. She was sitting with a pile of newspapers next to her, and a big bowl of home made glue. She'd fold the pieces of newspaper in the shape of an envelope with one hand, and put the glue on its edges with the other to stick the folds in place, then pass it along to a pile of readied envelopes. Hemant was making neat piles of the readied envelopes and tying them up.

Soon Darshan was standing outside Hemant's door. The VCR had been hired after all, and would reach his house in the evening. And along with it, four films. He was crazy with joy.

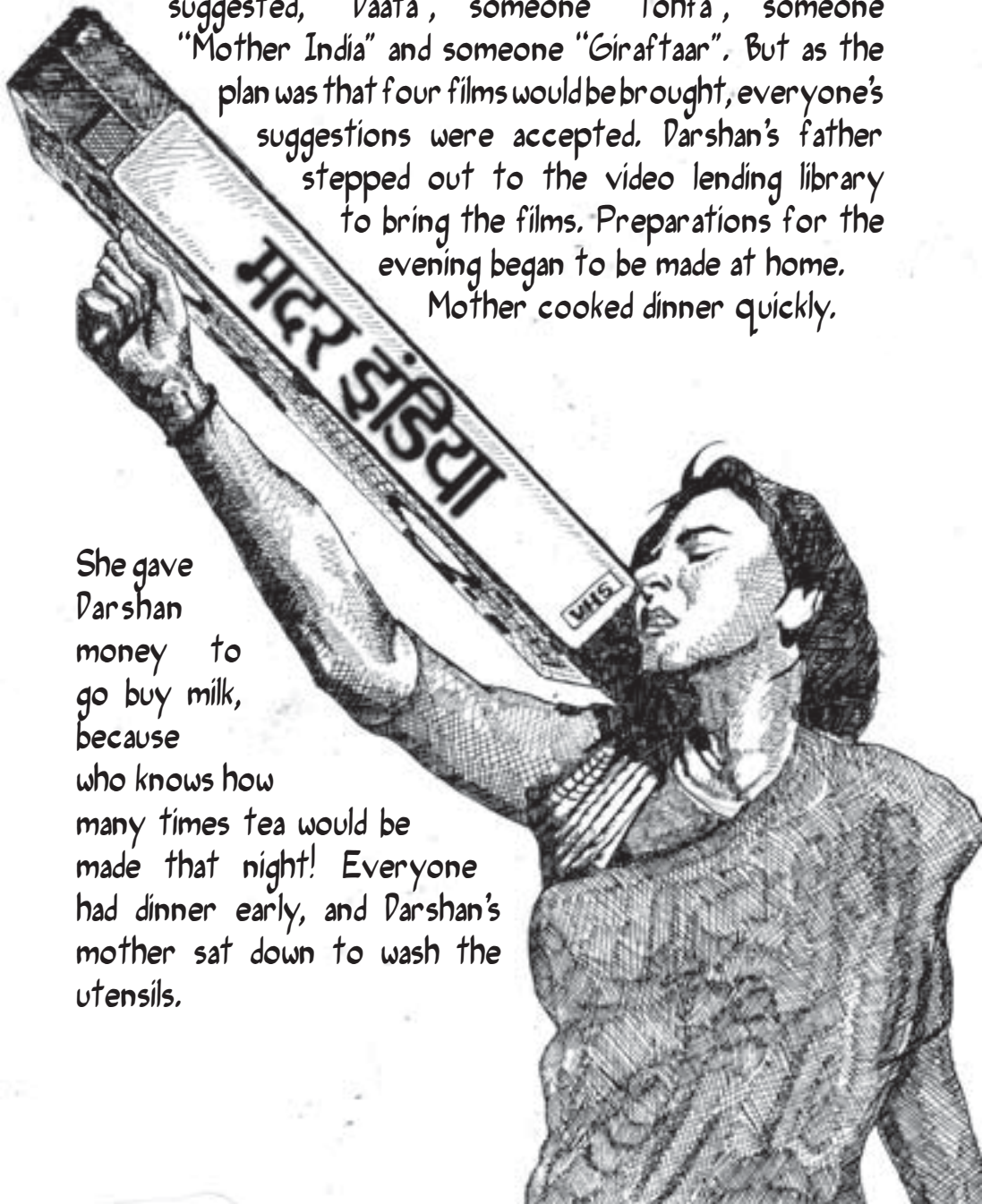
They talked quickly. "Ok," Hemant said, "I'll tell my mother I'll be at your place in the evening".

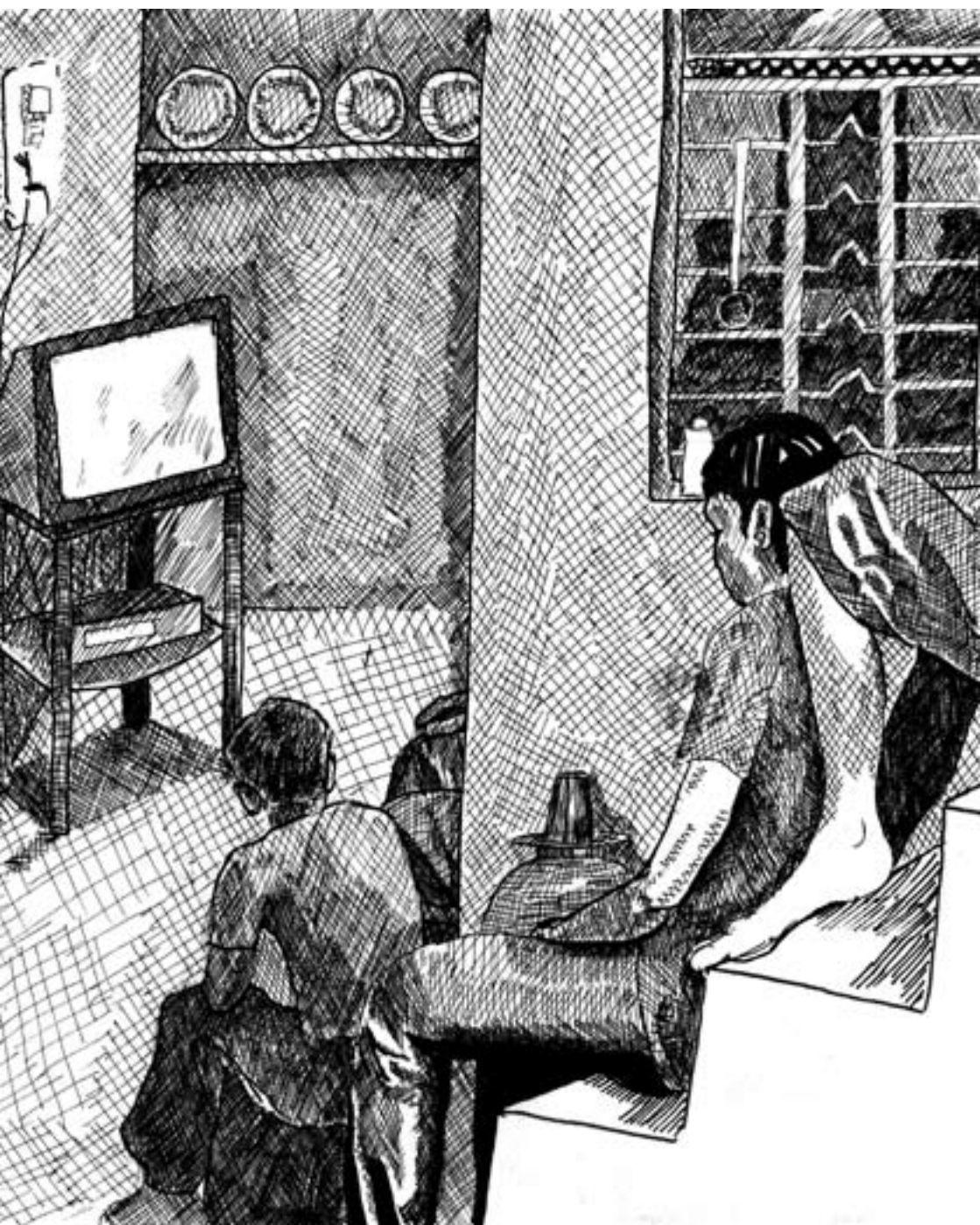


Then he went back in and resumed making bundles of envelopes.

A discussion was on about which films to bring. Someone suggested, "Daata", someone "Tohfa", someone "Mother India" and someone "Girafaar". But as the plan was that four films would be brought, everyone's suggestions were accepted. Darshan's father stepped out to the video lending library to bring the films. Preparations for the evening began to be made at home. Mother cooked dinner quickly.

She gave Darshan money to go buy milk, because who knows how many times tea would be made that night! Everyone had dinner early, and Darshan's mother sat down to wash the utensils.





Subhash demonstrated how the cassette is to be inserted, how to eject, how to play, fast forward and rewind, what to do if the image flickers. Then he left.

When the first film got over, Darshan's father said they should turn the TV off for five minutes, so it cools down. He touched the TV and said, "It's become really very hot." Mother made tea for everyone. Darshan ran to his father and asked if he could operate the VCR. He was refused. The film began. Darshan was happy because he had learned how to operate the VCR by observation.

They watched films till early morning, through many rounds of tea, splashing water on their faces to keep themselves awake.

Who is to say how many people's sleep this VCR stole, and how many film buffs it created while it played.



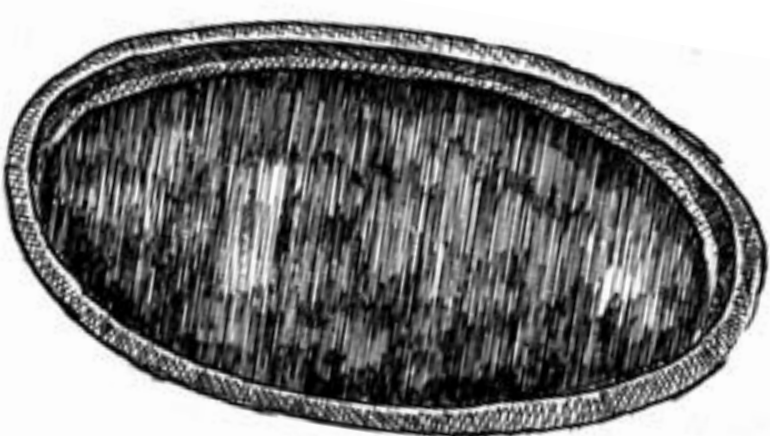
The tar road is the main defining border of this area. Along it is a market, and everything needed to get by life can be found here. There are groceries, paan shops, shops selling clothes, and lots more. And there is a sweet-seller's shop too, one which has earned a favourable status here over time.

Srikant works by the side of this road. He washes sugarcanes, cuts them up into small pieces and gathers them on his cart, on which he first spreads a red rexine sheet. On these small pieces of sugarcane, ganderi, he generously sprinkles fragrant kewra before heading out.

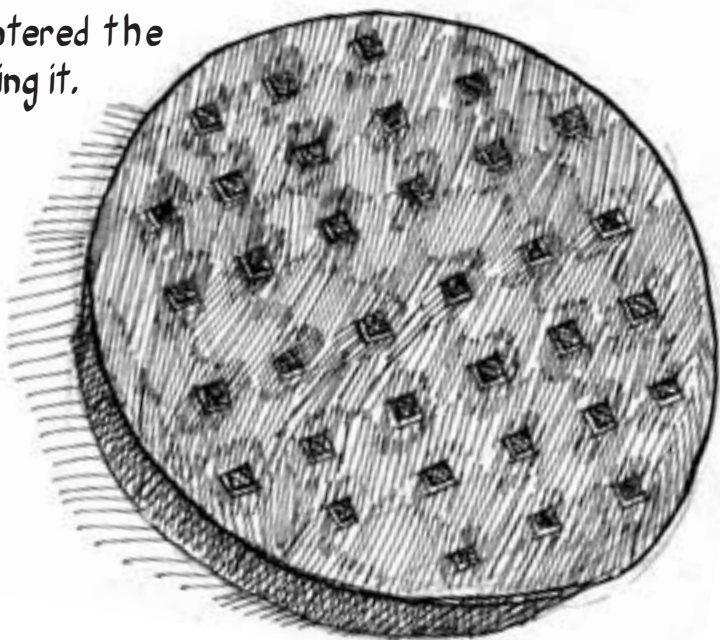
He moves from lane to lane, calling out, "Cold ganderi for you, sweet ganderi for you". He sells his ganderi, and alongside, as he moves through the lanes, he buys scrap metal, cardboard, paper etc, to resell at the kabadi shop in the evening.

After he saved enough for it, he bought himself an old VCR.





A man has entered the gutter and is cleaning it.



Each time he stands up to get a breath of fresh air, his body unrecognisable underneath the grime, his companion passes him a lit bidi for him to take a drag from it.

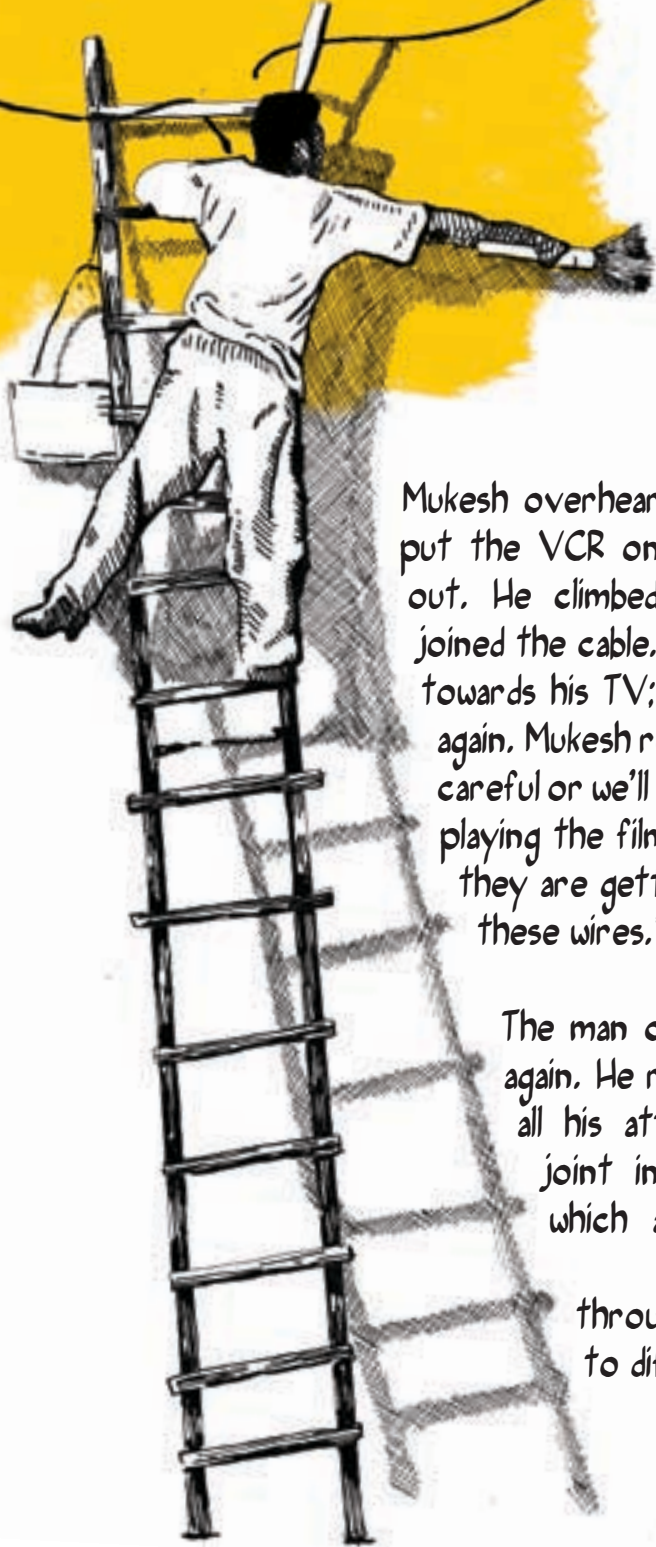


Pawan's house
is getting
whitewashed.
It's his sister's
wedding in ten
days.

The house has
two rooms;
there's a small
third room on
the roof. The
window on the
forehead of the
house almost
opens into the
house facing it.
A tent has been

set up in the narrow lane, in front of the house. A man with a bucket of paint has climbed up a ladder, and is applying paint on the outer wall with brisk strokes of his brush. His face and clothes are spattered with paint.

Jaanu came out of his house and looked about. The ladder had snapped the transmission cable. Jaanu called out, "Bhaiya, what have you done with the wire?" The man replied, while still on the ladder, "What do I know about the wire? I only shifted my ladder."



"But," Jaanu rued,
"that was for the
cable TV. The film
transmission has
been broken."

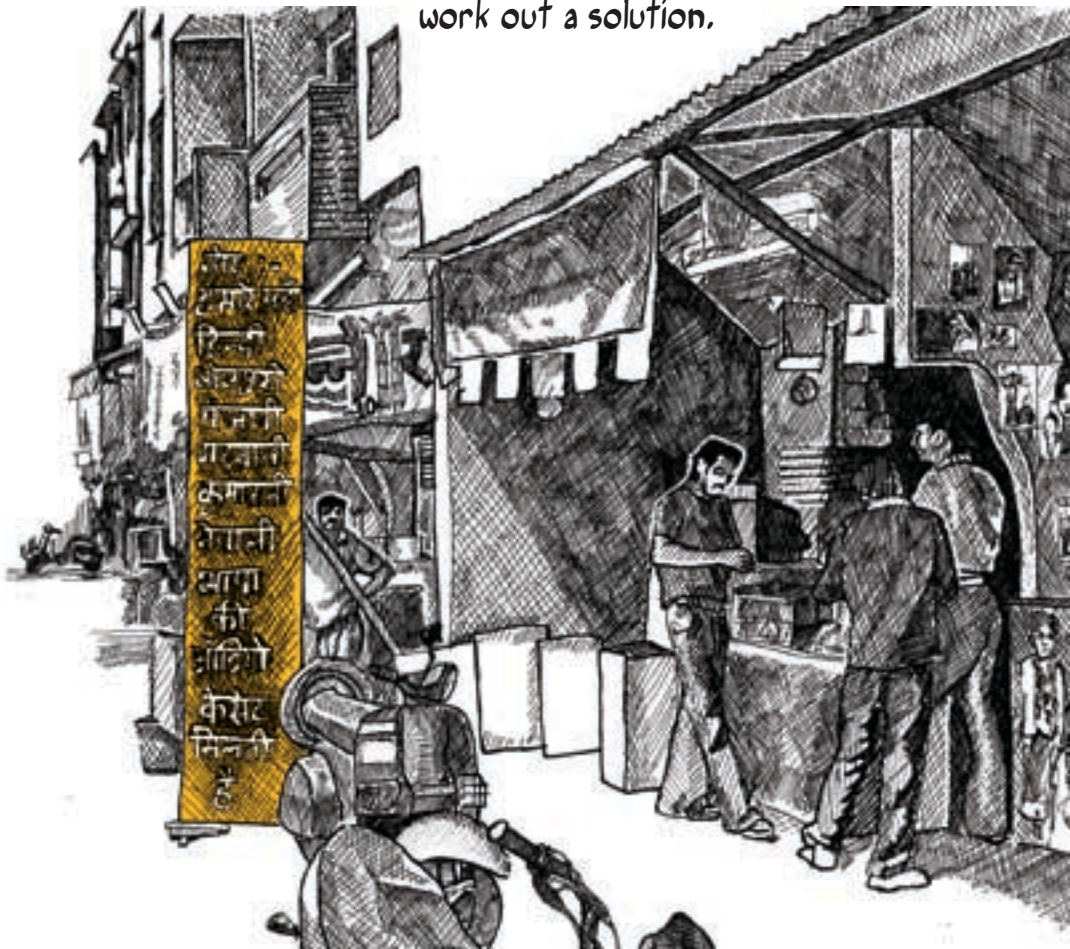
Mukesh overheard the conversation,
put the VCR on pause and stepped
out. He climbed up the ladder and
joined the cable. Jaanu peeped inside
towards his TV; the film was playing
again. Mukesh requested, "Bhaiya, be
careful or we'll lose money. The VCR
playing the film is in our house and
they are getting the film through
these wires."

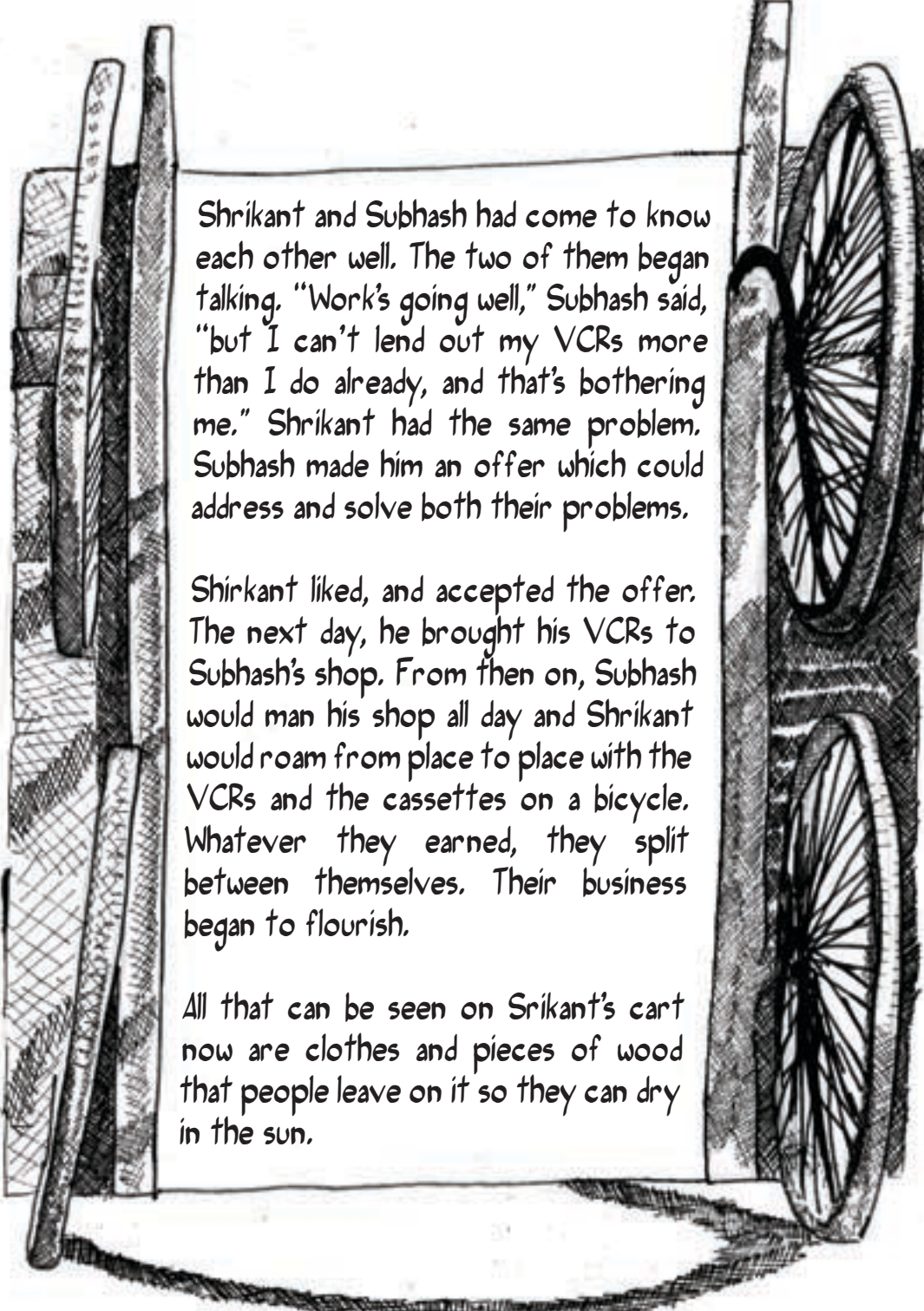
The man climbed up the ladder
again. He resumed painting, but
all his attention was on the
joint in the cable through
which a film was reaching
different TV sets,
through different wires,
to different houses.

Shrikant had started to loan out the VCR in the jhuggies near where he lived. He'd get the video cassettes from Subhash's shop. He had begun to earn well now.

He bought another old VCR. Now he rented out both his VCRs. He would rent out the VCRs from home by night, and go out to sell sugarcane during the day.

Each evening when Shrikant would come back home, he would hear from his neighbours of people who had come looking for him. But poor Shrikant, what was he to do? He was at a loss to work out a solution.

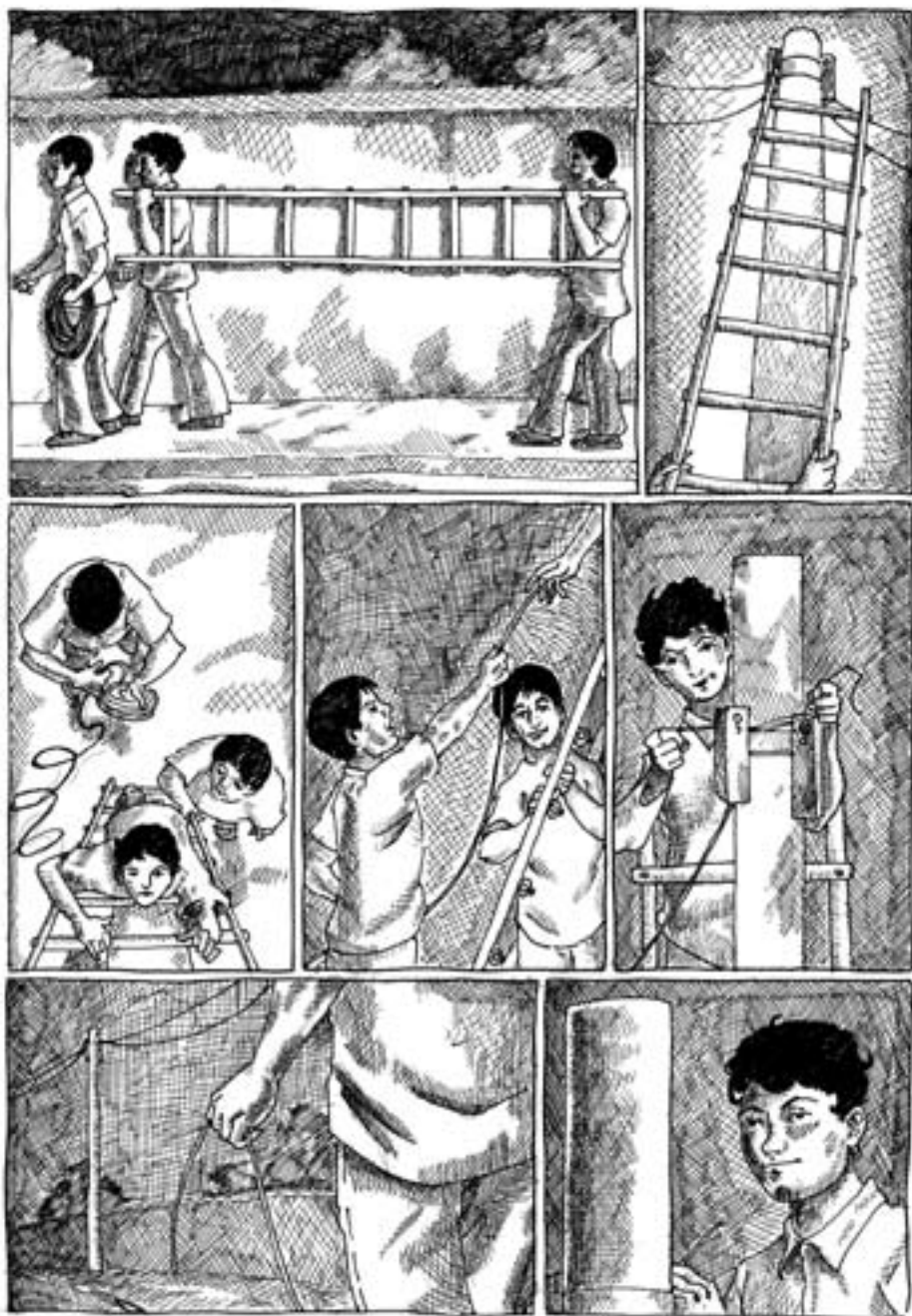




Shrikant and Subhash had come to know each other well. The two of them began talking. "Work's going well," Subhash said, "but I can't lend out my VCRs more than I do already, and that's bothering me." Shrikant had the same problem. Subhash made him an offer which could address and solve both their problems.

Shrikant liked, and accepted the offer. The next day, he brought his VCRs to Subhash's shop. From then on, Subhash would man his shop all day and Shrikant would roam from place to place with the VCRs and the cassettes on a bicycle. Whatever they earned, they split between themselves. Their business began to flourish.

All that can be seen on Shrikant's cart now are clothes and pieces of wood that people leave on it so they can dry in the sun.



Who are these young boys, laying out cables in this way?

This began to be discussed in every home. Everyone said the cable has reached our area now, and programmes will be telecast on our TV sets all day. We will need to pay by the month. This is thanks to Subhash, who has a huge umbrella on the roof of his shop, which catches films and relays them to different homes. If you want to watch a film of your choice, all you have to do is go tell Subhash.

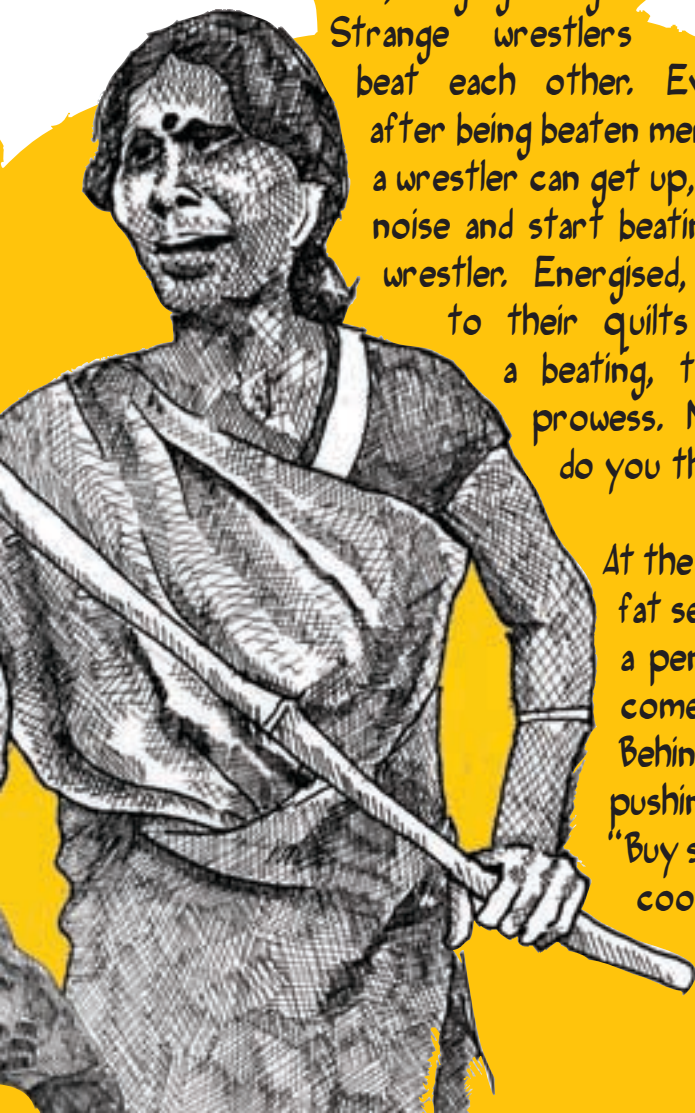
Subhash and Srikanth have been lending out VCRs for so many years, they know people's taste here.



Cable has taken over homes. Songs play from TV sets all day long. On the edge of the screens, logos of TV channels keep changing. Anuradha Podwal's face can be seen, singing songs.

Strange wrestlers beat each other. Even after being beaten mercilessly, a wrestler can get up, make a loud noise and start beating the other wrestler. Energised, viewers turn to their quilts and give them a beating, testing their own prowess. Mothers yell, "What do you think you're doing?"

At the door stands Shrikant, a fat set of cards in one hand, a pen in the other. He has come to collect his rent. Behind him a man is passing, pushing a cart, calling out, "Buy some ganderi, sweet, cool ganderi..."

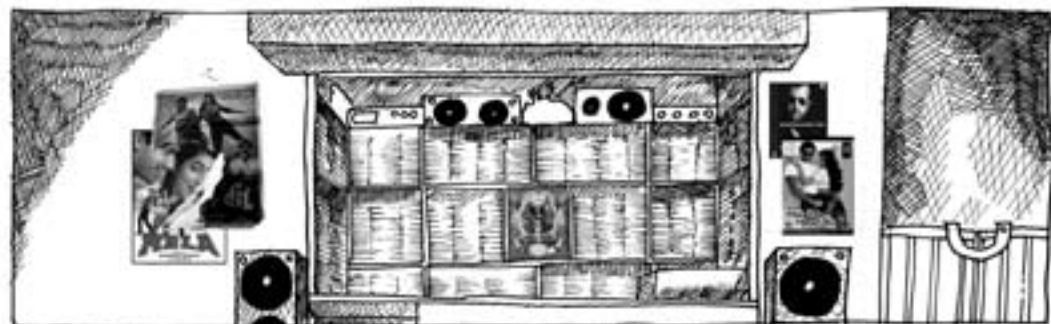


Pooran's magazine lending store was on the verge of closing down. This began to bear down on his household. He had no experience of any other work. His eldest son Anand insisted it was time for his father to switch lines. He worked on convincing him this was not just his young blood speaking; he said he had a plan. His plan went by the name "audio cassette".

Anand began to gather all the information he could about this line of business. Where can one buy audio cassettes from? What is the earning per cassette? He visited every shop he knew of, outside the neighbourhood, to find out what the trends were, what the shop must look like. He wanted to reorganise his father's shop in a way that the old clientele doesn't get confused, but switches with ease to the new.

But this switch needed an initial investment, and Anand didn't have money. He borrowed a sum on interest and headed out towards the market. He went to many shops and bought a whole range of blank cassettes, recorded cassettes and branded cassettes.

That's how Anand's new shop opened.
And it flourished.



**You came
into my life**

clean, empty, unused, unmarked
into my life. a surface
a speaking mirror.
a shape shifting

of sounds
traveller

**You came
a reliable
messenger.**

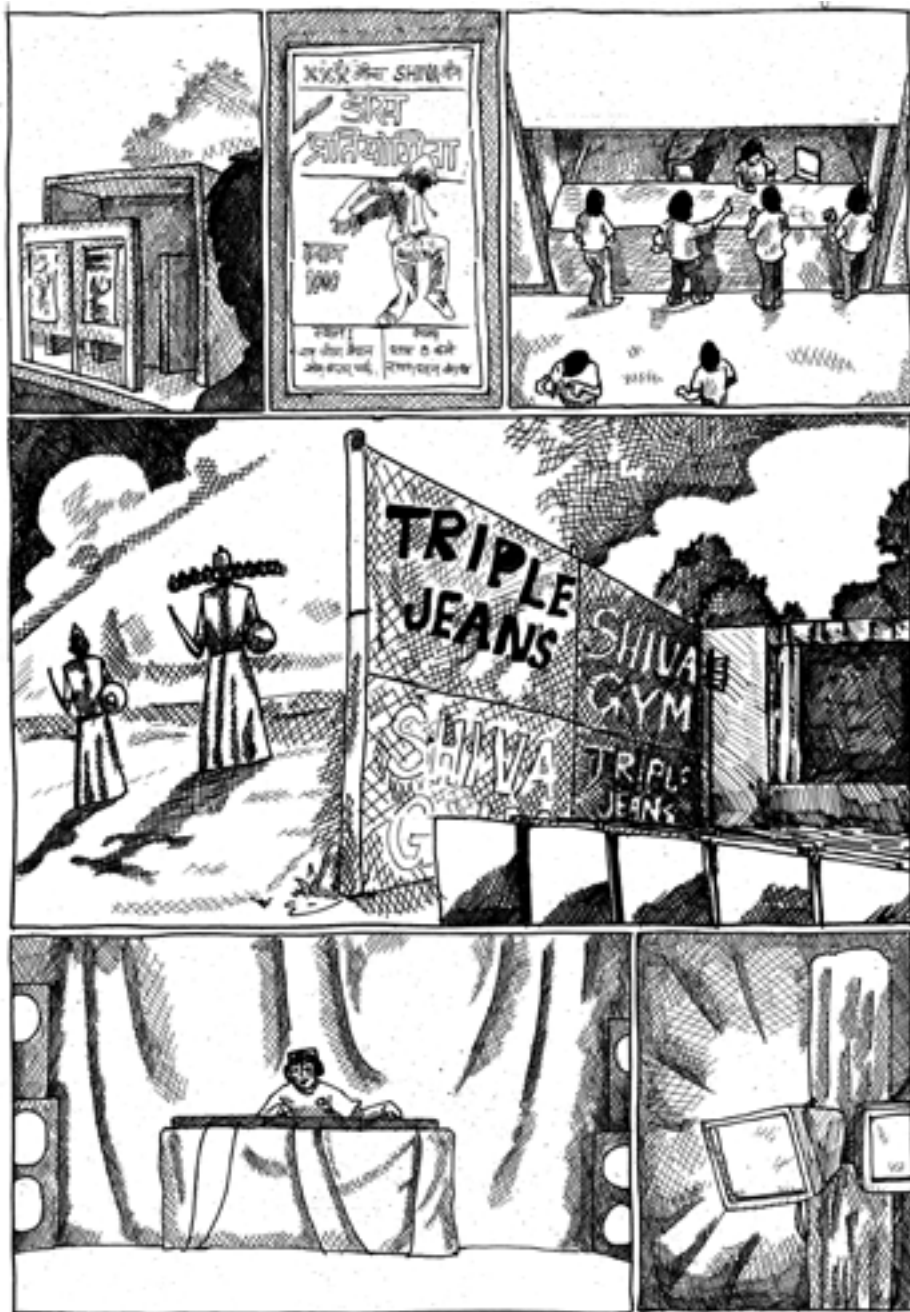
a reliable
messenger.
empty, unmarked, unused. you came
into my life. a surface of sounds
a human ear, a travelling

**a twin that
plays**

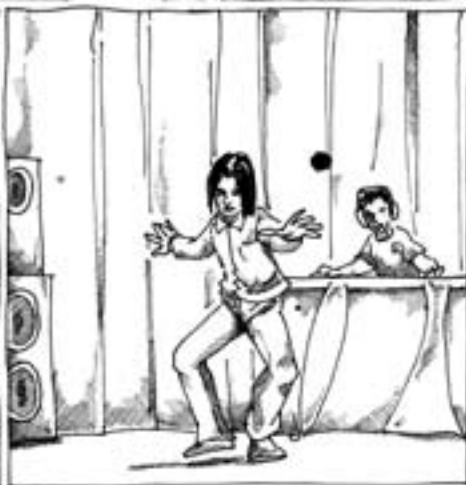


let her
into your
life
become a voice
a companion in sadness
become someone
a bard of joys
for everyone
become a gift before strangers
introduce yourself to the world





The boom of DJ music can be heard everywhere.



Neighbourhoods dance to the tune of DJs.
Dance competitions have blossomed.

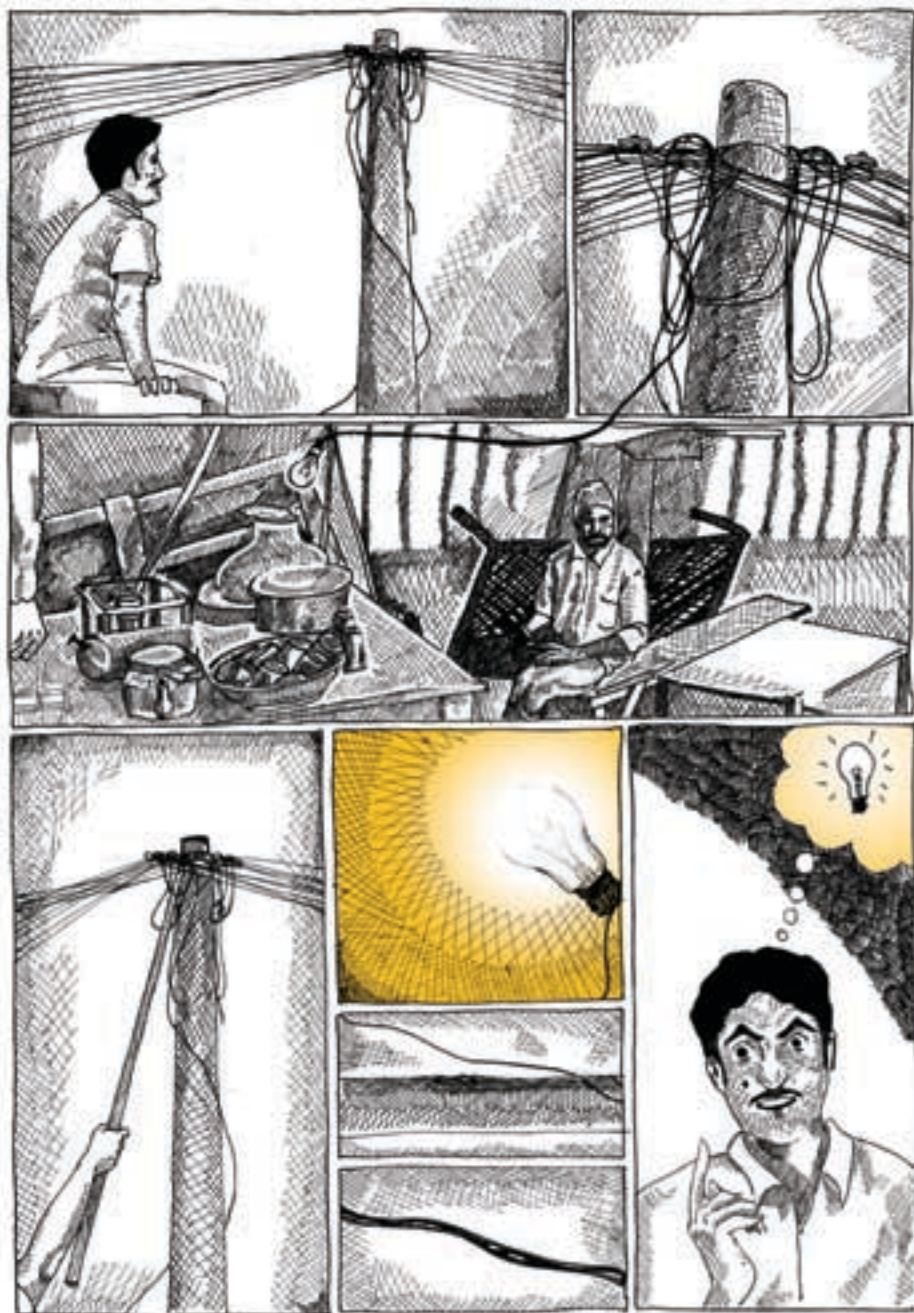
The recording set screeched with every rotation of the grooves of the cassette holder. A young man stepped into the shop. "My name's Deepak. I repair TV sets and cassette players." Anand didn't want to sound needy or too keen. But he wanted the young man to come again, so he told him, "There isn't enough work at the moment." The young man's face fell. "I'll come again," he said.

How could Anand set up this new work in his small space? It was packed with cassettes and recorders.

Across the lane was Suresh's tea stall. It opened at five in the morning and stayed open till ten or sometimes eleven at night. Men who delivered newspapers to different houses, people who set out early to work in factories, young artisans who worked in workshops in the locality, all came here to have their morning cup of tea.

If while he was making tea, the lone bulb that lit his stall switched off, Suresh would pick up a bamboo stick he kept ready by his stall and hit the mesh of wires on top of the electricity pole. The bulb would come back on.

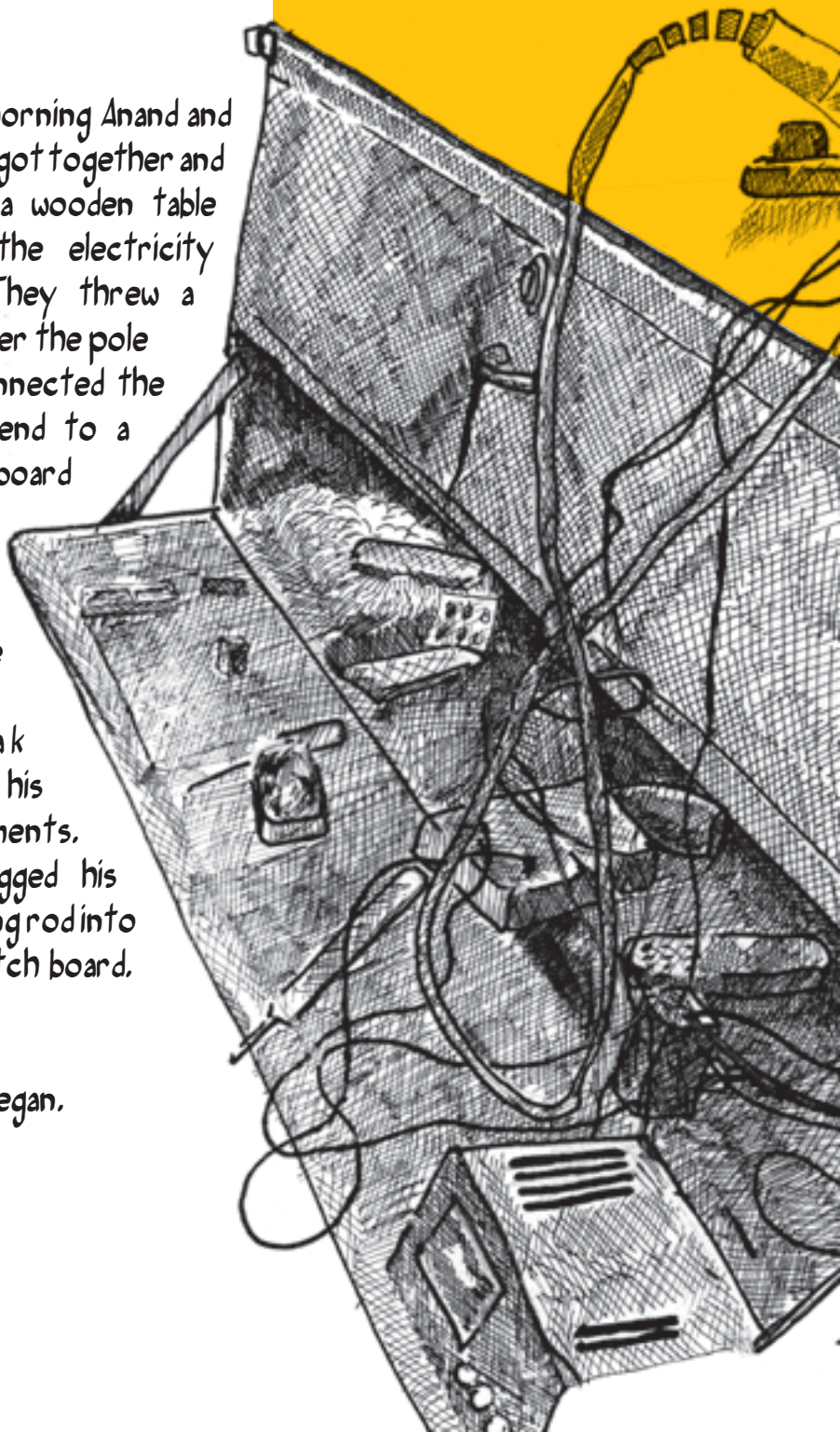


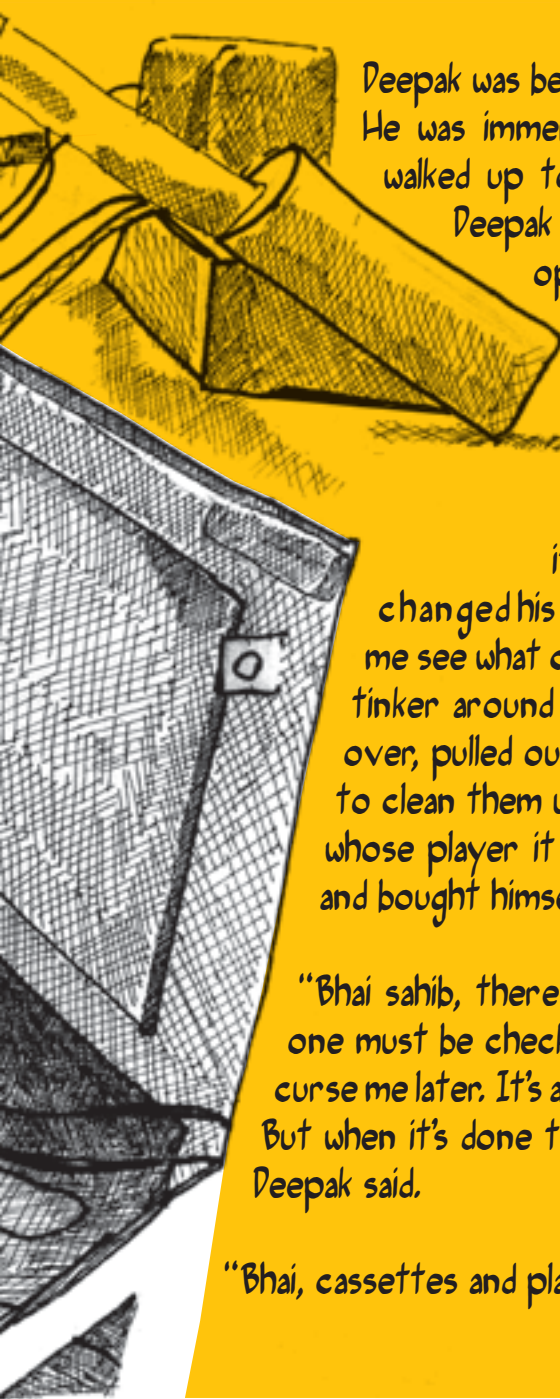


Anand worked out the entire plan in his mind.

Next morning Anand and Deepak got together and placed a wooden table below the electricity pole. They threw a wire over the pole and connected the other end to a switch board they had placed on the table. Deepak laid out his instruments. He plugged his soldering rod into the switch board.

Work began.





Deepak was bent over a radio set, soldering. He was immersed in his work when a man walked up to him with a cassette player.

Deepak left what he was doing and opened up the cassette player with a screwdriver. Peering inside, he said, "You'll have to leave it here for a day". "No, I need it today," the man insisted, "otherwise I'm taking it back." Deepak immediately changed his stance. "Wait," he said, "let me see what can be done." He then began to tinker around inside the player. He looked it over, pulled out many of its parts and began to clean them up with a toothbrush. The man whose player it was walked up to the tea stall and bought himself a bidi.

"Bhai sahib, there are so many parts, and each one must be checked. If I miss something, you'll curse me later. It's a lot of work, so it will take time. But when it's done the work will give satisfaction," Deepak said.

"Bhai, cassettes and players have replaced radios."

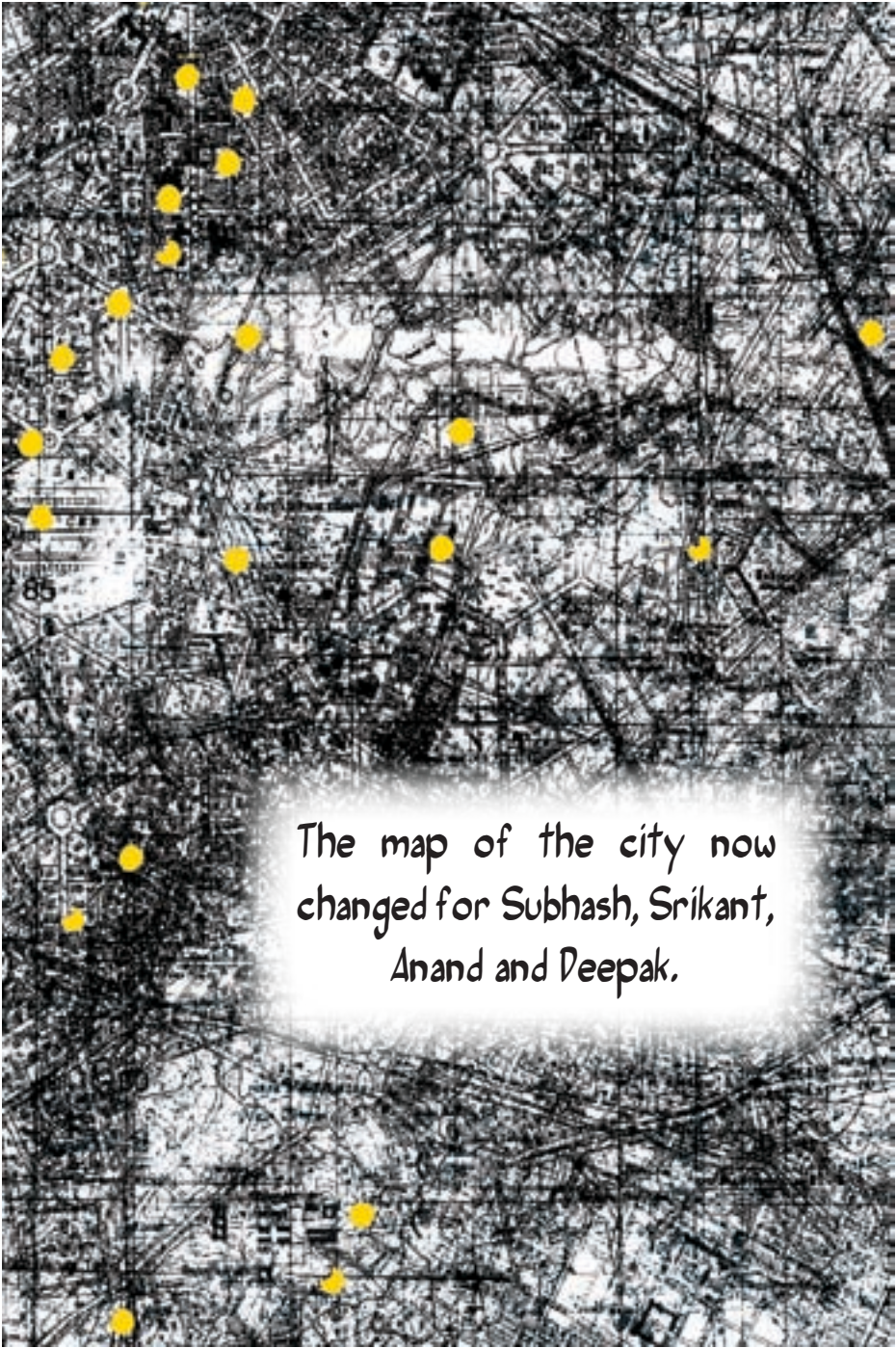
"And you know what's about to happen next? CDs are going to replace cassettes soon. And the day CD players get cheaper, there go our cassette players. They'll just lie about in the corners gathering dust. CD players are what people like you will be repairing soon. They won't have as many parts as these players."



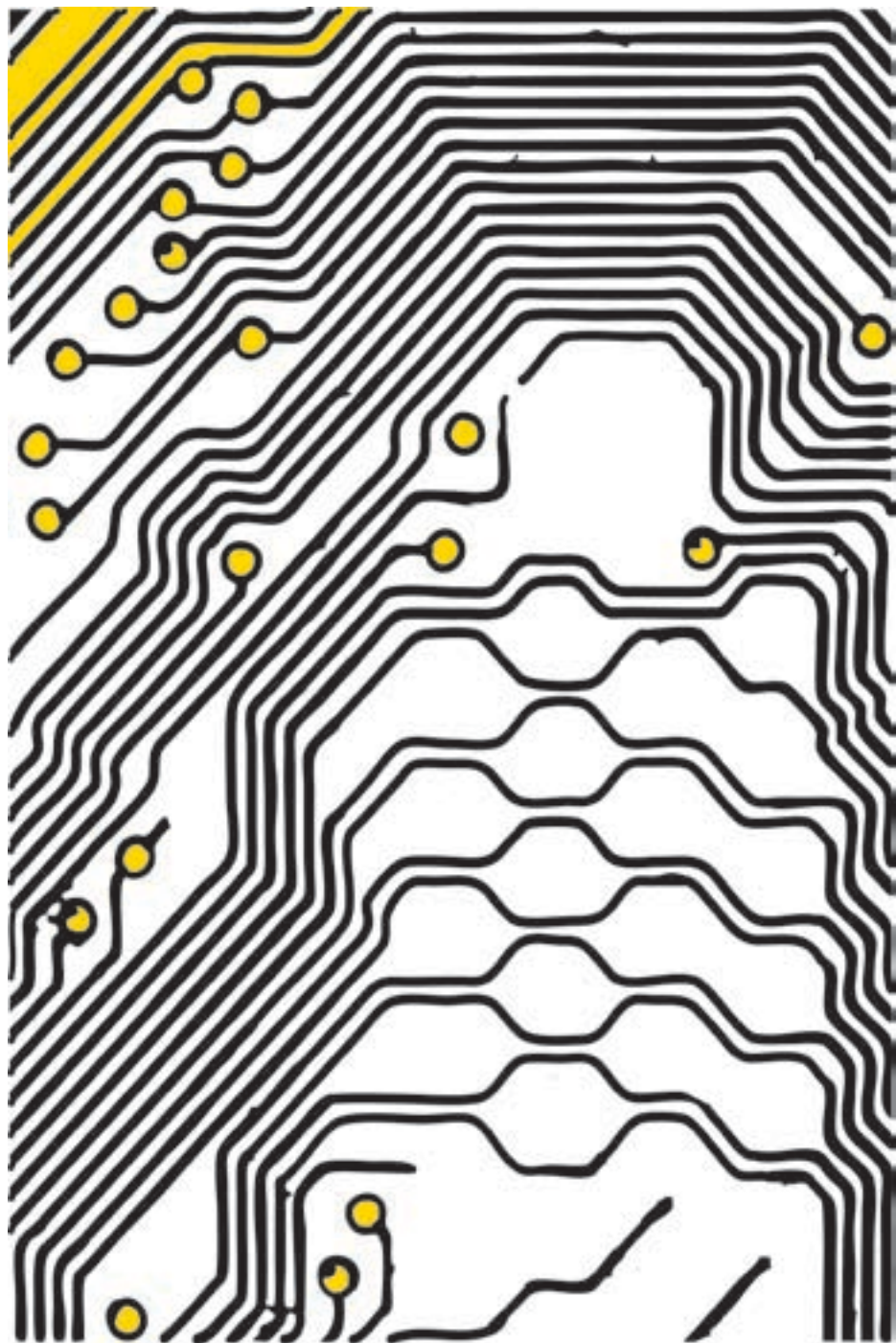
Deepak pressed the play button. The player was now working fine. He closed it up and tightened the screws. The man paid him and went away. Deepak returned to his soldering iron.



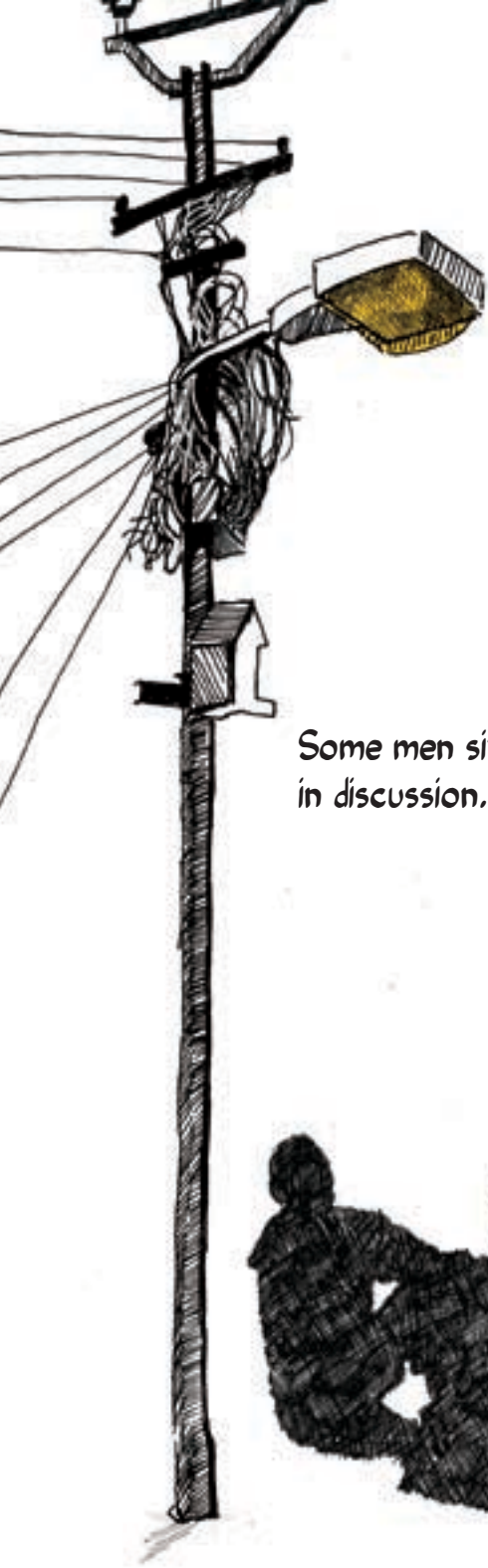
"If I want to repair CD players, will I have to learn something new, or will I know how to do it from what I know already?"

A black and white map of a city, likely a street map, with a grid overlay. Numerous yellow dots are placed at various locations across the map, indicating specific points of interest or destinations. The dots are scattered across the map, with a higher concentration in the upper left quadrant and a few in the lower left and bottom center. The map shows a dense network of streets and buildings, with some areas appearing more open or less developed than others. The overall tone is historical or archival, given the black and white color scheme.

The map of the city now
changed for Subhash, Srikant,
Anand and Deepak.

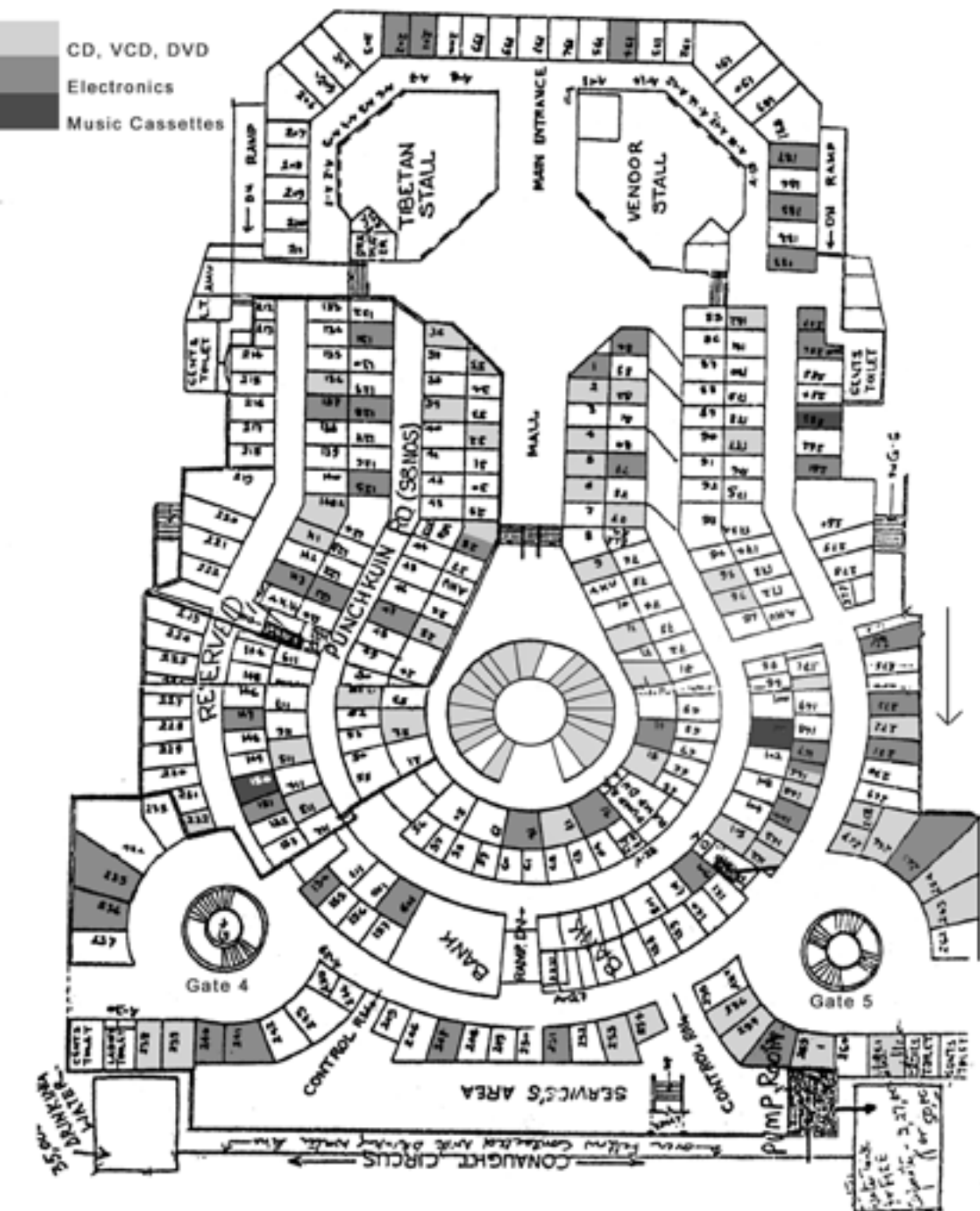




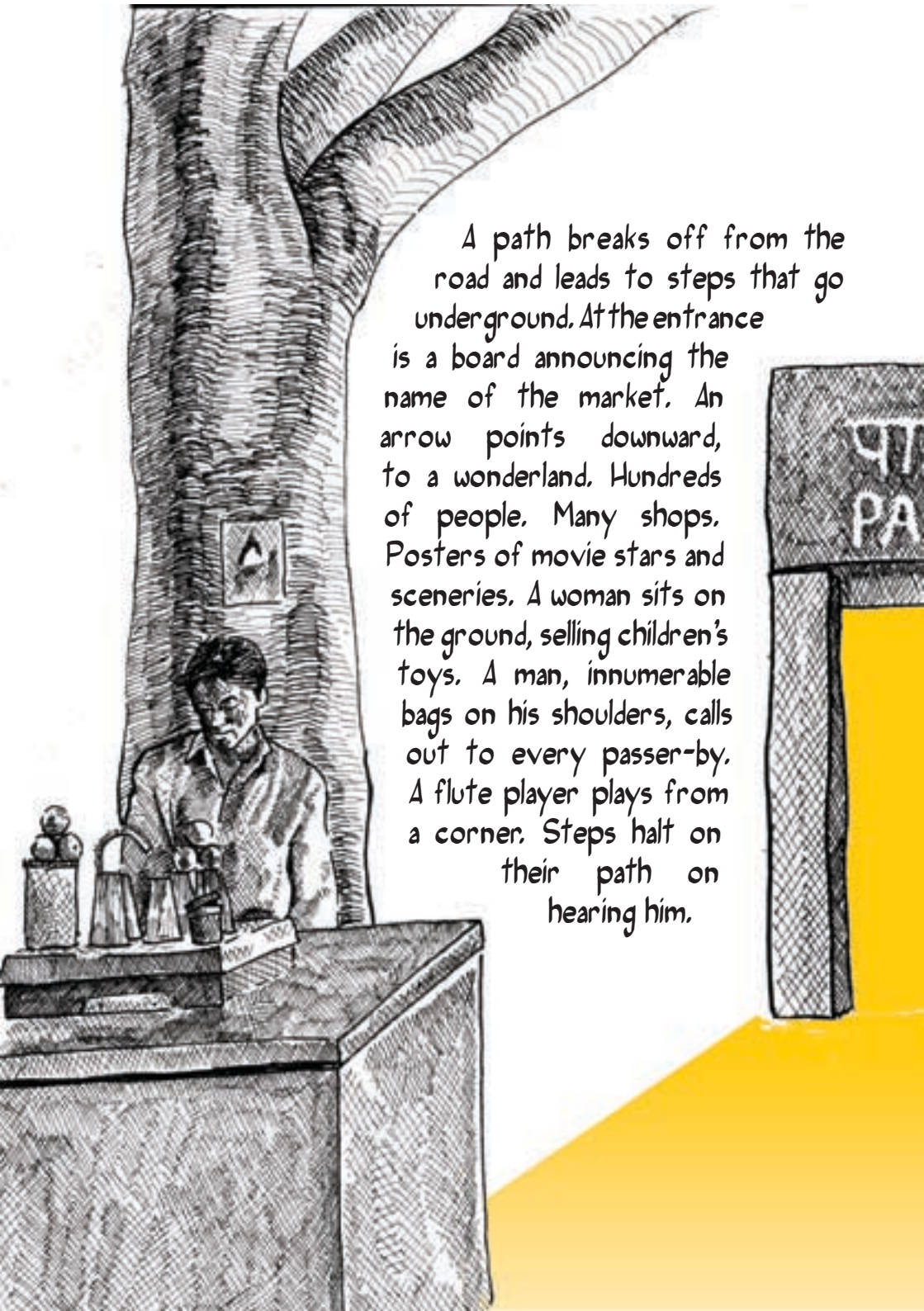


Some men sit on the footpath, deep
in discussion.





“Have you been to the underground bazaar?”



A path breaks off from the road and leads to steps that go underground. At the entrance is a board announcing the name of the market. An arrow points downward, to a wonderland. Hundreds of people. Many shops. Posters of movie stars and sceneries. A woman sits on the ground, selling children's toys. A man, innumerable bags on his shoulders, calls out to every passer-by. A flute player plays from a corner. Steps halt on their path on hearing him.

Different kinds of sounds. Film songs, digital sounds from video games, vendors calling out to customer about their wares.



A row of shops extends till far, then turns. Shops sell electronic goods. VCD players, video games, colour TVs, cameras, record players.

And they sell VCDs. So many VCDs that everything else pales in comparison.



Two young men were standing at Anand's shop, bags in hand. Anand was busy. As soon as the customers left, they took out VCDs from their bag. Anand made a selection of about fifteen to twenty CDs. Now they waited for their payment. Anand gave them part of the sum, saying, "Take the rest next time." Without a fuss, the young men agreed.

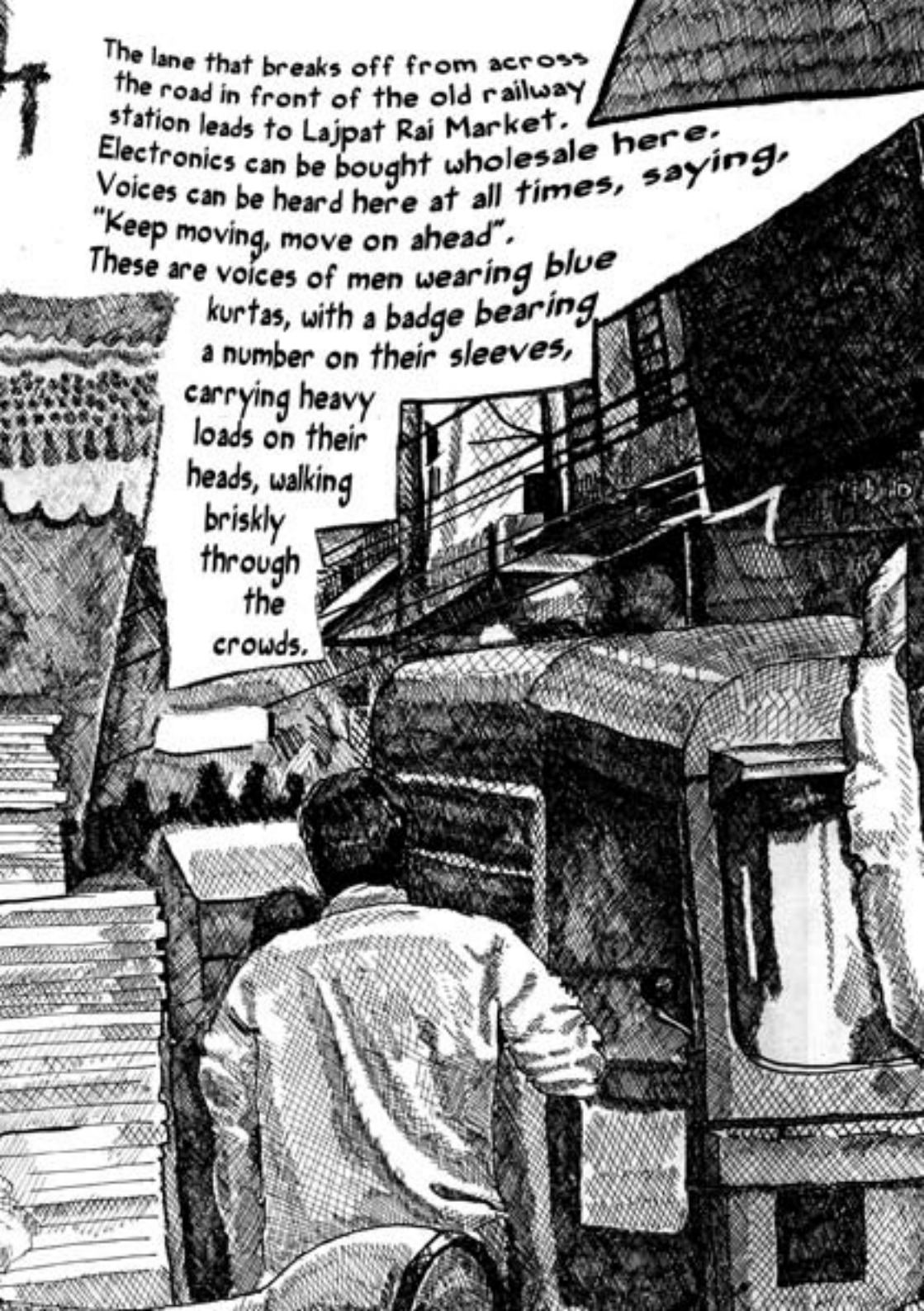
They want that Anand take CDs only from them, or atleast that he buy CDs from them every time they come. "Our CDs are copied directly from the original, via a computer," they reminded him. "This is the same material which is sold in Palika. We bring all the latest movies to your shop. Right at your doorstep." Anand asked them to come back with the next Friday's release.

Inserting a blank audio cassette into the recorder he started looking for the songs he needed to fill into it from a list he'd been handed by a customer.



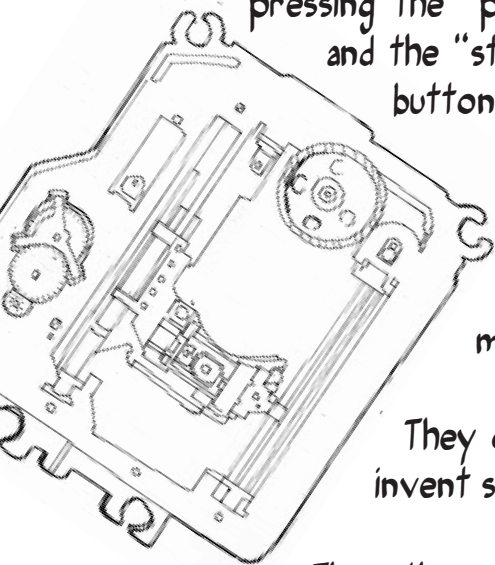
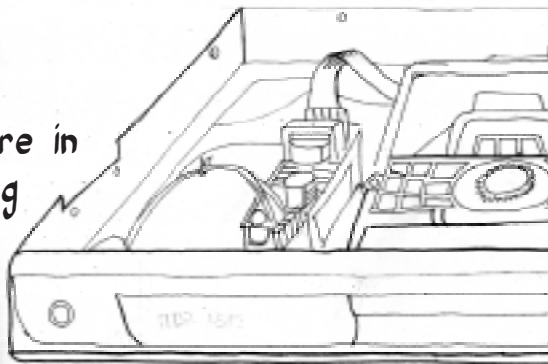
The lane that breaks off from across the road in front of the old railway station leads to Lajpat Rai Market. Electronics can be bought wholesale here. Voices can be heard here at all times, saying, "Keep moving, move on ahead".

These are voices of men wearing blue kurtas, with a badge bearing a number on their sleeves, carrying heavy loads on their heads, walking briskly through the crowds.





The only sounds one hears are in halves and quarters: everything is played only to check if it plays, so the gap between pressing the "play" and the "stop" buttons is very less.



The most magical artisans in the world work in this market, who can make anything they are asked to make.

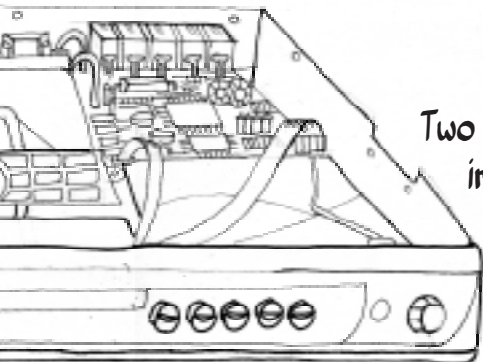
They can join anything with anything to invent something new.

Then they stick a label of one company or the other onto what they have made, probably making those companies feel remorse at not having thought up this electronic item themselves.



It's because of their inventiveness that things that are made here travel to the far corners of the country, reaching even the farthest and smallest of localities.





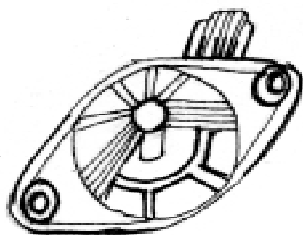
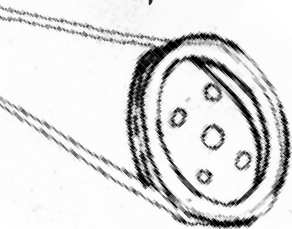
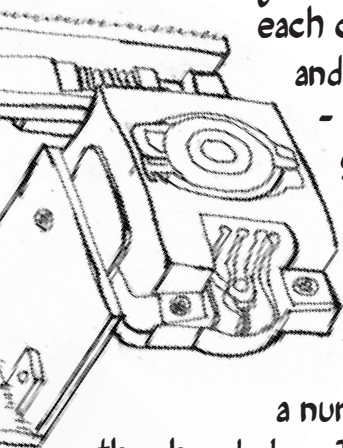
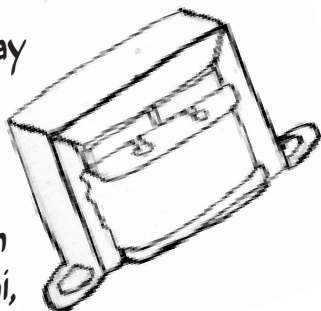
Two people sat, one on each table, intently soldering a machine part to a plastic body. They worked with speed. Another man was sitting on the floor. He would insert a CD into each plastic body, connecting it to the TV set lying on the other side

of the room. If on the TV he saw what he liked, he would put the plastic body away and reach out for the next one. Another man, sitting near the door, was taking each checked-up plastic body and sticking labels onto them

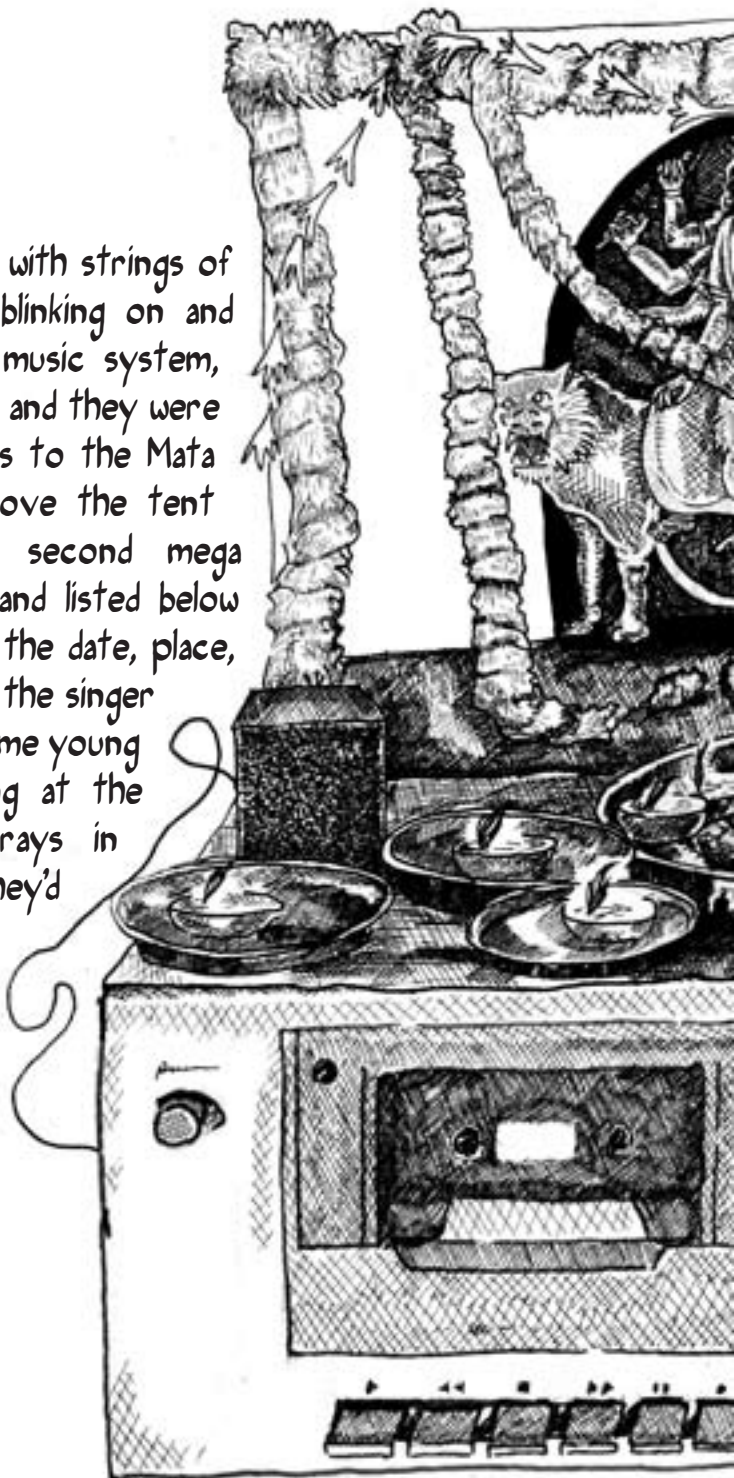
- Philips, Panasonic, Soni, Samsung, LGe. The labels

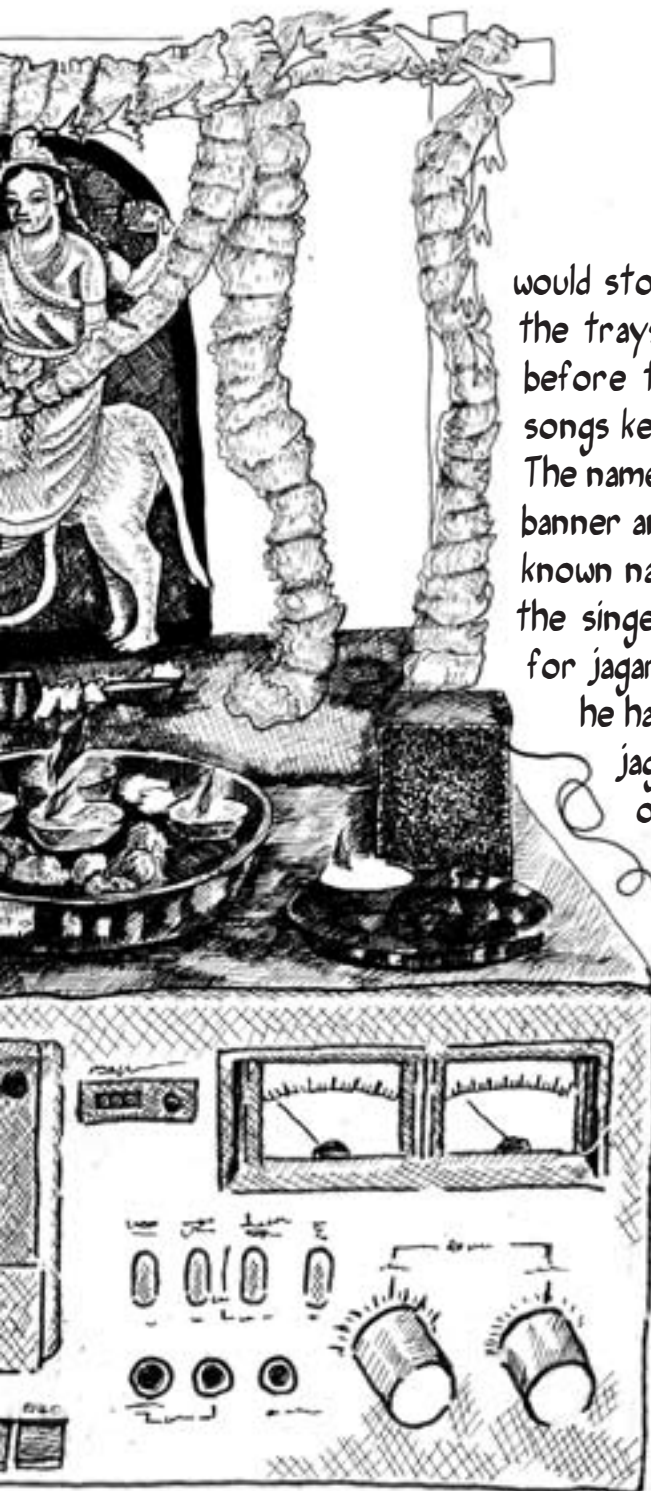
were kept in a big cardboard box. Each plastic body was then fitted into a box bearing the same name as the label that had been pasted on it. A boy came after some time, lifting up a number of boxes on his head, taking them to

the shop below. This work is done in barsatis above every shop in this market.

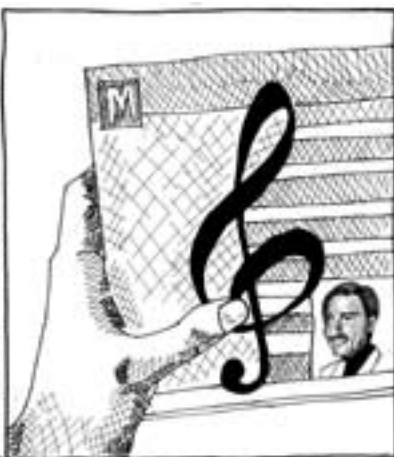


The tent was lined with strings of light, which were blinking on and off. There was a music system, with two speakers, and they were pelting out bhajans to the Mata Rani. A banner above the tent announced, "The second mega bhagwati jagaran" and listed below these words were the date, place, time, the name of the singer and his troupe. Some young men were standing at the entrance, with trays in their hands. They'd call out the Mata Rani's name loudly, over and over, to encourage people to give donations. Some





would stop, put some coins into the trays, and bow reverentially before the Mata Rani's idol. The songs kept calling out her name. The name of the singer which the banner announced was a very well known name in the area. This was the singer who was usually called for jagarans around here. Earlier he had been spotted often in jagarans, playing the dholak, or the majeera, or singing along in a chorus. Today he had become a solo jagaran singer. "Mother's blessings have ensured he has made it in life." This was often heard being said about him.



"Oh! Weren't you part of an orchestra before? You used to play the dholak."



"It's very easy to become a singer. There's a lot of scope for that today. If you have a desire to sing, it's enough. The rest can be got on rent."



This is the world
in which voices
are captured
and
transformed
into a CD
or a cassette.

Bhai
Nazeem
rents
out three to
four "sets" to
the factories
nearby,
everyday.

A set is a VCD
player, a colour TV and
movies. Every set is rented out with
four films, because Bhai Nazeem doesn't like to
bring his sets back at night, and he sees no reason
why they should just lie there in the place he has
rented them to after one movie has been seen.

Nazeem had set up shop here with a mind to start a
video game parlour. But because there are more adults and
fewer children here, the game parlour would lie vacant and
unvisited for long stretches, and this hurt him. He'd already
bought TV sets for the video games. All he needed to do was
buy the VCD players. The low cost sets available in the market
offered a solution even to this problem. The films that
were bought were pirated copies.

There are many factories in this area, where a lot of people work. They also sleep in the factories. They buy food from the eateries nearby. That they should live in the factories works well for the factory owner too - it provides him with security for the factory at night, and in case of emergency production he doesn't have to go out looking for labour. Newer factories had been opening here steadily. That has meant more workers have been coming. These workers were Bhai Nazeem's main customers.

It was night. Many people could be seen on the road, running, looking troubled and anxious. A government vehicle with a team inside came and halted on the road. Some people who looked like babus got out and headed towards a factory. The crowd on the road looked in their direction. It was learnt this team was from the electricity department; they are here to seal a factory that has been running in a residential area.





Bhai Nazeem too stood at the entrance to his shop, looking towards the factory. Just then a customer came to his shop and asked about hiring a VCD player. Bhai Nazeem nodded his head and went and stood behind his counter. The customer asked, "I need it for today." "Yes, sure," Bhai Nazeem replied, "But you'll have to take four VCDs." He agreed immediately, "No problem, I'll take four films. Make sure the prints are clean." Then he looked through the VCDs and as he looked he asked, "Do you have *that* film?"

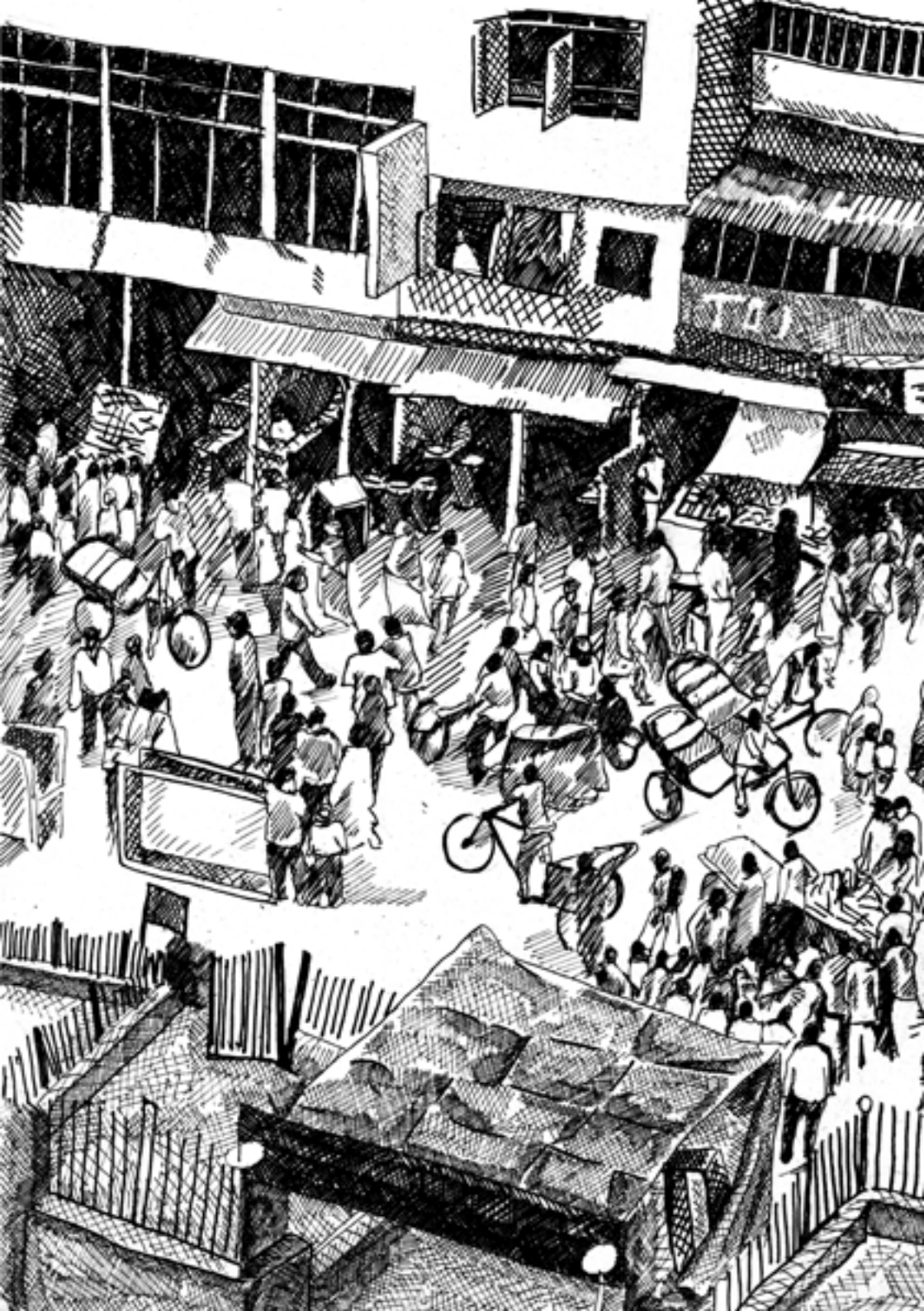
"Which one? Bahadur Fauji?"

"Yes."

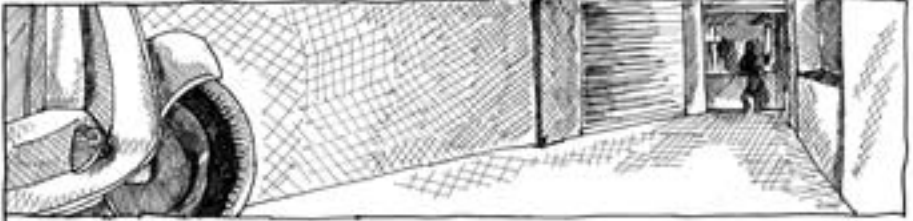
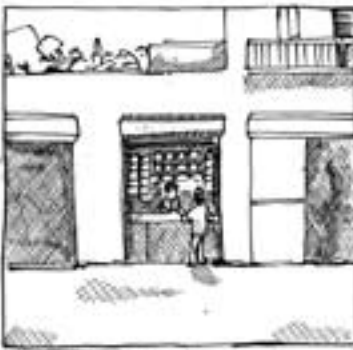
"I won't give it on rent. You have to buy it."

"But what do I want to buy it for? Where will I keep it? If I want to watch it again, I'll come back."

Bhai Nazeem said, "No, we get into too many hassles with the police that way. Tell me if you want it, or let it be."







Bhai Nazeem: Bring twenty pieces.

Salesman: Right away? I can't bring everything with me. I can get in trouble with the police.

Two constables were standing near a two wheeler parked at the crossroad, waiting for someone. A boy came up to them with some CDs and showed them to the constables.

One constable: Which shop did you bring them from?

The boy: The one next to the house where the fourth floor is getting constructed.

Second constable: Lead us to it. Lets see who this rascal is.





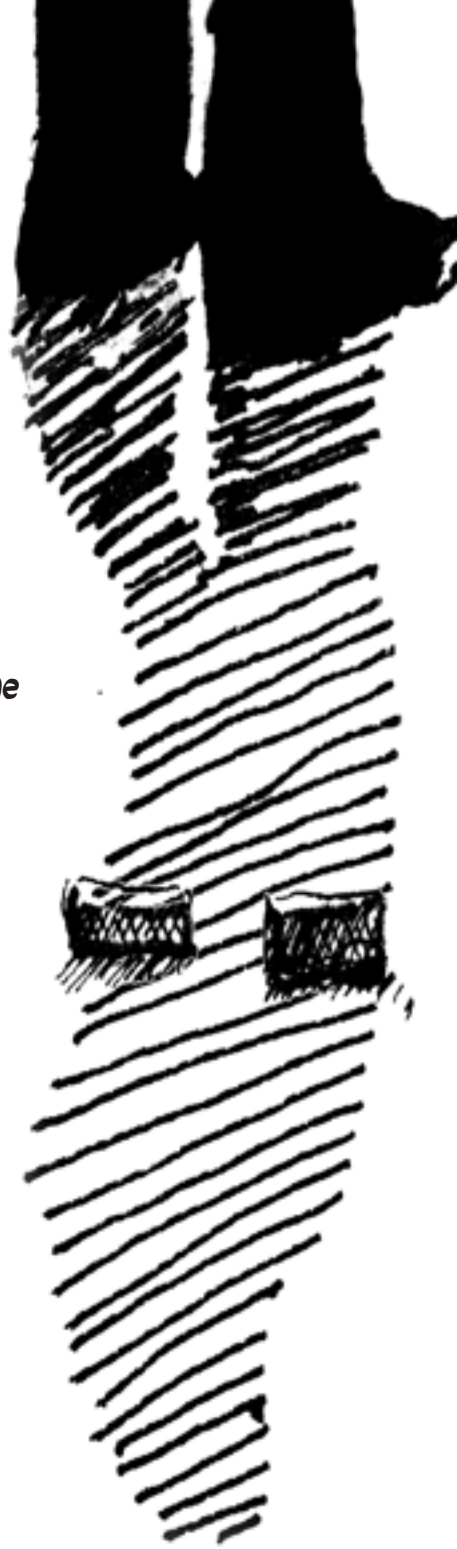
"Seal his shop."

Stepping out of the police station, he went straight back to his shop. Other shopkeepers were standing there, talking. Seeing him, they turned to him and asked, "What happened?"

"The rascals were asking for fifteen thousand rupees, but I got the matter settled in two thousand. That much I can earn back in a week."

He lifted the shutter and reopened the shop. The others too returned to their shops.

A customer came and asked, "Do you have *that* CD?"



A flight of steps leads up from the house that stands opposite the hand pump, to the three rooms on the second floor. The rooms have been transformed into a workshop. The steps begin from three feet above the ground. This gap between the ground and the first step is in consideration of the height the lane is yet to acquire, layer by layer, with every passing year. As you climb up the stairs, you have to bend your head. The wall along the stairs is crowded with pipes that take the sludge from the house to the sewer. Despite the blazing sun outdoors, the stairs are pitch dark.

To go to the second floor, a door has to be crossed. The door is much bigger than what the space can accommodate, so it has been fixed at an angle.

There is an empty space in the middle of the room. An iron ladder has been placed there, leading to the roof. On one side a small toilet had been made. Sitting in the small space beside the water tank, an artisan was applying black polish on a shoe. Leather cuttings of different colours lay on the floor. Wooden moulds were hanging on the wall, and next to them were three electricity meters, one to each room.

Two young artisans sat near the door, intently looking at the screens of their mobile phones.





"Have you seen this clip?"
"Can you put it in my phone too?"



Kallu
scans
the streets,
smiling,
taking
everything in,
trying to reconcile
what he remembers
with what he is
seeing.



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We live in a tumultuous media environment. There is widespread confusion, uncertainty and awe at the inventiveness of the thousands of people in media networks who innovate, copy, tinker, recycle, produce, remix and relay. The protagonists of *Tinker.Solder.Tap* bring alive the ways in which the relationship between life and the media has been re-scripted in the various neighbourhoods of our cities. The story begins in the mid-80s, when a man returns home with an object called a VCR. The chain of effects that follows transforms irreversibly the social life of his neighbourhood, and its reverberations can be felt all over the world.

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